

# JUDAISM

The Love of God in Maimonides and Rav Kook

*Lawrence Kaplan*

The Quest for the Lost Princess:  
Transition and Change in Jewish Lore

*Howard Schwartz*

The Bene Israel and the Baghdadis:  
Two Indian Jewish Communities in Conflict

*Sadok Masliyah*

The Leadership Qualities of Moses

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Jacob and Esau and the  
Emergence of the Jewish People

*Daniel J. Elazar*

Why the Jewish People Should  
Welcome Converts

*Lawrence J. Epstein*

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless — the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

*Judaism* will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*



# *The Love of God in Maimonides and Rav Kook*

LAWRENCE KAPLAN

*For Pearl—and the students and staff of Midreshet Lindenbaum, 1990-1991 .*

CERTAINLY MAIMONIDES, IN RAV KOOK'S EYES, WAS a heroic figure, one of the towering spiritual giants of Judaism.<sup>1</sup> No doubt, Maimonides' many-sidedness, his being both a great halakhic scholar and an outstanding philosopher, not to mention physician, communal leader, and more, must have, among other factors, touched Rav Kook—himself a protean and many-sided figure: rabbinic scholar, theologian, mystic, poet, communal leader, and more—on a very deep, personal level. Moreover, given Rav Kook's holistic approach to the Jewish tradition, about which I have written elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> it should come as no surprise that Rav Kook viewed Maimonides' life and work as constituting an organic and unified whole.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, when we examine Rav Kook's attitude toward Maimonidean *thought*, the picture becomes much more ambiguous and complex.<sup>4</sup> In this paper I wish to touch on just one corner of this ambiguous and complex attitude on the part of Rav Kook by showing how Rav Kook's own conception of the love of God draws upon Maimonides' conception—but in inverted form. After uncovering the epistemological, axiological, and metaphysical roots of this disagreement between Maimonides and Rav Kook as to the nature of the love of God, I will proceed to indicate how their divergent conceptions are reflected in their divergent interpretations of the Akedah (the "binding of Isaac").

## I

In 1935, a few months before his death, Rav Kook wrote an essay in commemoration of the octocentennial of Maimonides' birth,<sup>5</sup> "*Ha-Ma'or ha-'Ehad: Li-Demut Diyukeno shel ha-Rambam*" ("The Singular Luminary: Toward a Portrait of Maimonides").<sup>6</sup> In this essay, Rav Kook speaks about two fundamental, apparently contradictory, ways whereby the divine voice calls unceasingly within the depths of man's soul and makes itself heard. The first way is via the voice of man's own natural spiritual yearning for closeness to God, insofar as man perceives that all existence testifies that only this close-

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LAWRENCE KAPLAN is Associate Professor of Rabbinics and Jewish Philosophy in the Department of Jewish Studies at McGill University.

ness is the true happiness and the true good. The second way is via the voice, which purifies this very yearning for closeness, which lifts it out of its dark alleyways and brings it forth into the clear luminous light. The first way is the way of affirmation; the second, the way of negation.

Despite the opposing nature of these two movements of the soul, both, for Rav Kook, are necessary if one is to achieve a pure and holy existence. The religious yearning, *per se*, if not purified, can result in dark, impure, primitive impulses. It can be the source of all idolatry and paganism. On the other hand, a religious approach to God based solely on purity of thought and lacking any powerful desire for personal closeness to God results in a cold, overly rationalistic, and skeptical form of religion. What is necessary, in Rav Kook's view, is that the spiritual movement of man's desire for God's closeness, the principle of affirmation, be combined with the spiritual movement of man's purification of that desire, the principle of negation. Or, as Rav Kook states in his very important essay, "*Derekh ha-Tehiyah*" ("The Road to Renewal"), psychic enthusiasm, the illumination of the spirit, must be combined with moral and rational enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> The principle of affirmation, of yearning for God's closeness, of psychic enthusiasm, is the strength of the world; the principle of negation, of the purification of the yearning for God's closeness, of moral and rational refinement, is the light of the world.

While both these principles, for Rav Kook, are contained, fused together in harmonious fashion in Judaism, this unity in the life of the community, at least before the end of the days, is only an ideal. In the actual course of Jewish history, we find the principles of affirmation and negation, of passion and purity, of psychic enthusiasm and moral and rational enlightenment operating in relative isolation from one another, and different eras of Jewish history are generally dominated either by one principle or by the other. Thus, there were periods in Jewish history dominated by the principle of affirmation. The powerful desire for closeness to God was not sufficiently refined by the desire for the purity of this closeness. Particularly, in the view of Rav Kook, during the period of the First Temple, there was an outburst, an outpouring, of this wave of desire for God's closeness, unaccompanied by any wave of purification of this desire. And precisely this powerful, but impure, outburst was at the root of the passion for idolatry that seized hold of the people at this time and ultimately brought about the exile of the people from its land.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, as Rav Kook notes, there were periods in Jewish history dominated by the principle of negation. The need for the purity of religious thought was brought to the forefront and stressed. And, once again, this very emphasis on the purity of religious thought, this emergence of a highly-abstract, refined, philosophical form of Judaism, weakened the desire for closeness to God, cooled the passionate religious yearning for the divine presence, and gave rise to a certain religious skepticism, to a certain religious restlessness, to a sense of alienation and distance—an almost infinite distance—from God. And, Rav Kook argues, this

alternating movement between the principles of affirmation and negation, between the desire for God's closeness and the purification of that desire, is constant, insofar as the natural, almost inevitable, tendency is for one principle to aggrandize itself at the expense of the other.<sup>9</sup>

If, however, the principles of affirmation and negation, spiritual enthusiasm and moral and rational refinement, alternated or, at times, struggled with each other for dominance in the life of the *community*, they came together in the lives of Judaism's great spiritual giants. In them, "all the streams of affirmation, which derive from the search for God's closeness in all its strength, coexist in perfect harmony with all the streams [of negation] that purify this [closeness]."<sup>10</sup> Such a spiritual giant, for Rav Kook, was Maimonides himself. "The two contraries, the affirmation and the negation, merged together perfectly in the mighty lofty spirit of his personality in a complete harmony of peace and truth."<sup>11</sup> Maimonides, thus, for Rav Kook, embraced within himself both the light of the world, intellectual rigor and purity, and the strength of the world, religious passion and love, both light and strength blended together in a splendid consummate unity.

Now there can be no doubt that this laudation of Maimonides is deeply felt; and there also can be no doubt that Rav Kook sought to achieve a similar synthesis in his own thought—and person. But, and here the ambiguity arises, an examination reveals that their views as to how this synthesis or union of love and intellect is to be achieved move in opposite directions; they, therefore, arrive at diametrically opposed conclusions that one might say are reverse mirror images of each other. Indeed, as we shall see in a moment, Rav Kook very neatly and subtly—or, perhaps, not so subtly—succeeded, in his essay, in assimilating Maimonides' views to his own.

For Maimonides, the love of God is the intellectual love of God, that is, one *begins* with the intellectual *knowledge* of God, but *then* imbues that intellectual knowledge with drive, passion, and desire—drive, passion, and desire that are themselves cognitive in nature—thereby transforming intellectual *knowledge* of God into intellectual *love* of God.<sup>12</sup> For Rav Kook, as he states in "*Ha-Ma'or ha-'Ehad*" and other places in his writings,<sup>13</sup> the true love of God is the intellectually and morally-refined desire for God's closeness, that is, one *begins* with a passionate, intuitive, and *non-intellectual* love of God, but *then* subjects that intuitive and passionate love to moral and intellectual refinement and purification, so that the love of God is no longer dark and turbid, but clear and luminous, so that the *love* of God also becomes *knowledge* of God.<sup>14</sup> To use Rav Kook's categories of affirmation and negation, we may say, then, that for Rav Kook, a person in achieving the union of intellect and love starts with the pole of affirmation and concludes with that of negation, while, for Maimonides—though one would never know this from reading "*Ha-Ma'or ha-'Ehad*"—the direction of movement is reversed, from negation to affirmation.<sup>15</sup> To put it another way, for Maimonides, knowledge of God gives rise to, *generates*, love;

for Rav Kook, knowledge of God *purifies* an already existing love. In a word, to borrow some terminology from Rabbi Soloveitchik (though the application is my own): For Maimonides, man binds himself to God through the pathos of intellect; for Rav Kook, through intellectualized passion.<sup>16</sup>

This profound disagreement between Maimonides and Rav Kook as to the nature of the love of God derives, I would suggest, from their fundamentally differing views concerning the nature of a person's ultimate perfection. For Rav Kook, the highest human perfection, that "supernal well" from whence all other perfections derive, is *ha-tom ha-penimi*, the inner wholeness of faith.<sup>17</sup> For Maimonides, however, the ultimate human perfection is intellectual perfection, the acquisition of the rational virtues, that is, knowledge of the truth.<sup>18</sup> To state the point more sharply: For Maimonides, it is the intellect "that . . . is the bond between us and God,"<sup>19</sup> though, as I just stated, that intellect must become imbued with drive, passion, and desire. For Rav Kook, the bond between man and God is fundamentally non-intellectual in nature; it is created by the deep faith in God that wells up from within, by the love of the soul for God as the absolutely good.<sup>20</sup> The intellect, to be sure, as we have just seen, plays, for Rav Kook, an important role in purifying this faith, but it is faith, not the intellect, which is the bond.<sup>21</sup>

I would further suggest that this root difference between Maimonides and Rav Kook as to whether the fundamental bond between man and God is essentially intellectual or non-intellectual in nature derives, in turn, from another root difference between them, this one metaphysical in nature. And, here again, we will see Rav Kook using a Maimonidean concept, but giving it his own particular twist.

Rav Kook in, ironically enough, a letter upholding the truth and holiness of the Kabbalah uses a Maimonidean text as a basis for viewing the anthropomorphic imagery of the Kabbalah symbolically. He cites Maimonides' statement, "All existents, aside from God . . . exist by virtue of the truth of His existence . . . and because He knows Himself . . . He knows everything" (*Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*, 2:9), and comments: "It follows that all existents, down to the slightest and most insignificant, and, consequently, all movements, down to the slightest and most insignificant, derive their existence from the truth of God's existence, so that God by knowing Himself knows them all. However, in God's supernal holiness, as it were, everything exists in a state of extreme purity and holiness without any impropriety and unseemliness, heaven forbid."<sup>22</sup> It is this truth, in Rav Kook's view, to which the anthropomorphic imagery of the Bible, the rabbis, and particularly the Kabbalah points.

Let us leave to the side the question as to whether such a symbolic interpretation of anthropomorphic imagery can be attributed to Maimonides. I have, in another context, argued that it can not.<sup>23</sup> Here I wish to focus on the meaning of this statement of Maimonides in *Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*. Can it be understood as does Rav Kook? Now, certainly, it is true that, for Maimonides,



to cite Professor Alfred Ivry, “the forms of the world . . . are one in God, though the mode of the existence of these forms ‘there’ is beyond our comprehension.”<sup>24</sup> Note though that Professor Ivry is referring specifically to the existence of the *forms* in God. God, for Maimonides, is the efficient, formal, and final cause of the world, not, in any sense, its material cause.<sup>25</sup> Matter, for Maimonides, is always “a concomitant of privation,”<sup>26</sup> while God’s being consists of true existence.<sup>27</sup> As Professor Ivry notes, “matter, unlike form, is neither with God from all eternity, nor close to him after its creation.”<sup>28</sup> For Rav Kook, then, “*all existents . . . and all movements . . .* [exist] in God’s supernal holiness”; for Maimonides, only the *forms* do. We may then suggest the following: Since, for Maimonides, it is the forms which exist in a mysterious oneness in God, man binds himself to God through the cognition of the forms. But it is only the intellect—itself a form<sup>29</sup>—that, for Maimonides, is able to cognize the forms,<sup>30</sup> and, therefore, only the intellect is able to serve as a bond between man and God. For Rav Kook, since *all existents* and *all movements* exist in God, one perceives this indwelling of the world—in its wholeness, in its *oneness*, in *all* its facets—in God’s supernal unity via a mystical, intuitive, non-intellectual perception, and, thereby, binds oneself to God.<sup>31</sup>

## II

In the first part of my paper, I sought to clarify the divergent conceptions of Maimonides and Rav Kook as to the nature of the love of God and to uncover the epistemological, axiological, and metaphysical roots of their disagreement. In this part of the paper, I wish to indicate how these divergent conceptions of Maimonides and Rav Kook are reflected in their divergent interpretations of the Akedah.

That this should be so is not surprising, since Abraham, in Jewish thought, is, after all, the paradigm of the lover of God, “the seed of Abraham, who loved Me” (Isa. 41:8). (Abraham, incidentally, is the only individual in the Bible who is so described.<sup>32</sup>) And the Akedah, of course, is viewed, in Jewish thought, as the supreme expression of Abraham’s faith in and love of God. But strangely enough, it would seem, at first glance, as if Rav Kook’s justifiably famous interpretation of the Akedah, as contained in a letter to Dr. Moshe Seidel,<sup>33</sup> reflects not his own conception of the love of God, but that of Maimonides! A more careful reading of this text, however, in light of a parallel text from Rav Kook’s recently published *Orot ha-’Emunah* will show that this is not so, and that Rav Kook’s interpretation of the Akedah is, indeed, of a piece with his basic conception of the love of God described earlier. But let us turn to Maimonides’ and Rav Kook’s readings of the Akedah.

Maimonides’ reading of the Akedah is straightforward. For Maimonides, as we have seen, the true knowledge of God leads to the love of God,<sup>34</sup> which, in turn, leads to the service of God out of love.<sup>35</sup> Abraham achieved the true knowledge of God on his own,<sup>36</sup> which led to his becoming the great lover of God,<sup>37</sup>

which, in turn, led to his service of God out of love as expressed in the trial of the Akedah, which serves to inform us of the limits of the “love of God . . . and fear of Him.”<sup>38</sup>

Rav Kook’s reading, however, as contained in an extended passage in his letter to Seidel, is, as I have already indicated, more problematic. In view of the passage’s importance I will cite it in full:

That profound devotion to idolatry on the part of primitive man, who viewed it as his be-all and end-all, until this devotion overcame even the natural compassion of parents for children and resulted in the establishment of the cruel sacrifice of both son and daughter as a fixed aspect of the service of the Moloch, this devotion is a dark, turbid consequence of the realization, hidden deep in the heart of man, that the divine reality is more precious than anything, and that even that which is most cherished and beloved of man is as nought in comparison with it. When the divine illumination had to appear in its purity, it revealed itself via the powerful religious enthusiasm made manifest in the trial of the Akedah, which clearly demonstrated that passion and devotion to the divine reality need not be based on a knowledge of God clothed in the degrading garments of paganism in which the spark of divine goodness completely lost its way, but can be based on a pure apprehension of God, even though this pure apprehension cannot appeal to man’s primitive and gross imaginings and fears with the same force as paganism. Now it need not be said how greatly this pure apprehension of God illumines the pathways of man’s life, how it perfects his social existence, how it provides a firm base for man’s eternal, spiritual longings, for that which transcends the natural realm, for that “which is above the sun.” All this is obvious. The novel and unexpected point, worthy of note, is that the passion and devotion to God is not diminished in the slightest by an enlightened conception of God. This truth found its expression in Abraham’s firm decision in the trial of the Akedah, which established, as a firm principle for all generations, that a person’s refined attachment to the divine idea, elevated above all sense-images, also has the power to penetrate all the recesses of the heart. Were it not for this truth [as brought to light by the trial of the Akedah], mankind would confront the following [unpalatable option]. Either people could remain with their dark, primitive, albeit powerful and stirring, religious sentiments, or they could adopt a cold, rarefied form of spirituality, lacking any depth or profundity. Therefore, how great is the merit of our father Abraham . . . who fought against the workings of the primitive imagination with respect to the divinity. Now the only possible feeble merit attaching to paganism is its popular character, its ability to penetrate the recesses of the heart. The pagans could, thus, claim that human culture could not dispense with the primitive imaginings of paganism, inasmuch as the impact made by a pure concept of the divinity is too exalted and too refined to provide a fertile pasture for the multitude of nations. Then Abraham, “the father of a multitude of nations” (Gen.17:5), came and taught what had to be taught, so that no matter how the generations have declined, the pure light will penetrate the heart. And the binding of Isaac will be mercifully remembered in favor of his descendants for all generations.<sup>39</sup>

For Rav Kook, then, it is Abraham, the founder of monotheism, of the enlightened conception of God, that conception that, at first glance, might appear to be too refined and exalted for the multitude, who proved to be an *’av*

*hamon goyyim*, “the father of a multitude of peoples,” and *not* his pagan contemporaries. And it is the Akedah which demonstrates that this enlightened monotheism does contain within itself the power to penetrate the recesses of the heart and to speak to and inspire all people.

This reading of the Akedah is, I believe, exceptionally impressive, both profound and moving. However, on the face of it, it would seem that Rav Kook is ascribing to Abraham the Maimonidean movement from negation to affirmation, from the enlightened conception of God at which Abraham arrived via, as the Midrash informs us,<sup>40</sup> the rational contemplation of the cosmos to the religious passion made manifest in the Akedah. But how can this be? A passage on the faith of Abraham from *'Orot ha-'Emunah* will, in my view, enable us to resolve our problem.<sup>41</sup>

It is an accepted tradition among our people that our father, Abraham, inquired and examined until he set [the knowledge of] the Creator on a proper foundation. That is to say, that the [divine] light cannot enter the world through [the medium of] the natural [mode of faith] taken by itself. Even though this [natural mode of faith] is upright and follows a holy path, its goodness still cannot attain to the possession of the pure divine truth. For it is necessary that every natural content be intermingled with all types of natural dross. And this dross, with its own turbid nature, will becloud the fruits [of this faith] which ought to have developed and expanded like refined gold. However, after the intellect in its purity will refine and cleanse this power of natural faith which stands fast and firm, then this faith can be established as a fertile field for the Lord. Then all the fruits, including the natural fruits, which derive from this type of faith, a faith from which, to begin with, all natural dross has been removed, will be fruits of truth which are also infused with an eternal vigor. And these fruits will prove worthy of being an inheritance for all time. For in each and every generation, [this faith and its fruits] will once again be refined, sanctified, and elevated through the mighty natural quality of holiness and through that supernal purity belonging to the intellect which shines through the powerful holiness of the soul in its strength.<sup>42</sup>

In this passage, Rav Kook is asserting that Abraham’s discovery of the one true God through the rational contemplation of the natural order, was *not* the starting point of his religious quest. Rather, that rational contemplation served “only” to purify, refine, and elevate the natural intuitive faith in God that Abraham had possessed from the very beginning. Thus, Abraham’s discovery, via rational contemplation, of God as the Lord of the world should not, in Rav Kook’s view, be seen as the *first* stage in Abraham’s faith in God, but as the *second*. Abraham, we may say, like the pagans of his day, started with a natural, intuitive faith in the divine, a faith possessed of power, enthusiasm, vigor, and vitality, started with “the realization, hidden deep in the heart of man, that the divine reality is more precious than anything.” And Abraham, *to begin with*, again like his pagan contemporaries, also worshiped idols, as a consequence of *his* initially unrefined natural faith. However, Abraham, *unlike* his pagan contemporaries, succeeded, through the rational contemplation of

the natural order, in refining and purifying this natural faith. He came to the realization that the God in whom he had always had faith was a God who was not part of the natural order, but was the ruler and sustainer of that order, was a God elevated above all sense-images, was a spiritual and ethical God.

Abraham's movement, then, for Rav Kook, was not, as it had seemed, the Maimonidean movement from the principle of negation to the principle of affirmation, but rather, as we ought to have expected, just the reverse. Abraham *began* with the principle of affirmation, with the powerful, enthusiastic, natural faith in God, but *then* succeeded in subjecting that principle of affirmation to the principle of negation, succeeded in refining and purifying his powerful, enthusiastic, natural faith, so that it emerged as a "pure apprehension" and "enlightened conception" of God.

The powerful religious enthusiasm made manifest in the trial of the Akedah, discussed in the letter to Seidel, does *not*, then, refer to a religious enthusiasm deriving from Abraham's enlightened conception of God, which would be a Maimonidean move from negation to affirmation, but to the religious enthusiasm deriving from Abraham's natural, intuitive faith in God that *preceded* his enlightened conception of God. And the point of the Akedah is, as Rav Kook states in his letter to Seidel, to show that this religious enthusiasm was not diminished in the slightest by Abraham's subjecting that faith to the arduous process of cosmic contemplation; the point of the Akedah is to show that this enthusiasm had not lost any of its force or power through undergoing moral and rational purification; the point of the Akedah is to show that subjecting the principle of affirmation to the refining fire of the principle of negation in no wise diminishes the passion and longing for God contained in the principle of affirmation.

In sum, for Rav Kook the two principles of affirmation and negation became one in Abraham's person. But they became one not via the Maimonidean movement from negation to affirmation, from knowledge to love, or, to be more precise, to intellectual love, but via the Kookian movement from affirmation to negation, from the natural, intuitive faith in God to the enlightened conception of God, that enlightened conception which purifies that natural, intuitive faith without weakening its power and enthusiasm.

Our examination of the differing interpretations of Maimonides and Rav Kook regarding Abraham's love of God as manifested in the trial of the Akedah sheds light, in turn, on their differing views as to how the intellectual knowledge of God serves as a principle of negation. As we have seen,<sup>43</sup> the intellectual knowledge of God, for both Maimonides and Rav Kook, serves as precisely such a principle. But for Maimonides this negation is non-dialectical in nature. Abraham's knowledge of the one true God, attained through rational inquiry, thus completely nullifies his previous imaginative and idolatrous representation of the deity, leaving no residue. Therefore, once Abraham discovers the one true God, he leaves his idolatrous past completely behind. The only signifi-

cance in Abraham's having been, to begin with, an idolator, lies in his ability to discover the truth on his own, through that process of rational inquiry, despite his having been brought up on error.<sup>44</sup> For Rav Kook, by contrast, the knowledge of God as a principle of negation is thoroughly dialectical in character. Abraham's knowledge of the one true God, attained through rational inquiry, thus, does not completely nullify his previous natural and intuitive idolatrous faith in God, and, consequently, does *not* lead him to make a clean break with his idolatrous past. To be sure, Abraham purges that past of all its idolatrous elements; but the natural, intuitive faith that, in its unrefined state, had resulted in his worshipping idols, still remains. Only now that faith, purged of all its dross, shines all the more brightly. And the pure, luminous, enlightened enthusiasm of that faith, made manifest in the trial of the Akedah, provides "a fertile pasture for the multitude of nations."

That this, indeed, is Rav Kook's view is substantiated by a daring, almost startling, twist that Rav Kook gives to a rabbinic midrash. The midrash, in commenting on the verse "Unto you is the dew of your youth" (Ps. 110:3), states:

[This refers to] our father Abraham who was afraid and said to himself, "Perhaps I bear guilt for the sin of having worshiped idols for all these years?" God [therefore] told him, "'Unto you is the dew of your youth.' Just as the dew evaporates, so have your sins evaporated; and just as the dew is a sign of blessing for the world, so are you a sign of blessing for the world."<sup>45</sup>

Note the shift in the symbolic meaning of the dew. In the first comparison, the dew is likened to Abraham's sins: just as the dew evaporates so have your sins evaporated. In the second comparison the dew is likened, not to Abraham's sins, but to Abraham himself: just as the dew is a sign of blessing, so are you a sign of blessing. And this is as it should be. For certainly Abraham's sins could not in any way serve as a sign of blessing! Rav Kook, however, in referring to this midrash, paraphrases it thus: "For God said unto Abraham, 'even those years when you worshiped idols are a sign of blessing for the world.'"<sup>46</sup> But can this be? Can the years when Abraham worshiped idols serve as a sign of blessing? Indeed they can! For, as we have seen, Abraham, in Rav Kook's view, during those many years had worshiped idols precisely because of his natural, intuitive faith in God, though, to be sure, that faith, during that period, still existed in an unrefined and primitive form. Therefore, the enthusiasm and vitality, the passion and devotion of those years, once his sins had evaporated, that is, once that faith was refined and purified, once the move from affirmation to negation had been made, that very enthusiasm that later became manifest in the trial of Akedah, could indeed serve as a sign of blessing for the entire world.<sup>47</sup>



## III

This paper has sought to depict Maimonides' and Rav Kook's divergent conceptions of the love of God and to indicate how their divergent conceptions are reflected in their divergent interpretations of the Akedah. But it is, I believe, critical to emphasize that Maimonides and Rav Kook, who were both two of the towering spiritual giants of all time as well as profound and creative religious thinkers, *lived* their conceptions of the love of God, embodied their divergent readings of the Jewish tradition in their very being. Both Maimonides and Rav Kook were Abrahamic men, naturally, as they understood Abraham. Abraham, for them, was not just a subject for reflection, but, first and foremost, a model to be imitated. Or, to put the matter differently, their divergent understandings of Abraham derived not just from their divergent conceptions of the love of God, but from their divergent experiences of the love of God in their own lives. They were not just theoretical *exponents* of the love of God, however brilliant and illuminating, but personal *exemplars* of that love. For certainly, speaking from a phenomenological point of view, we may say that Maimonides made the Maimonidean movement from negation to affirmation insofar as his own rigorous and abstract philosophic speculation, his own commitment to an uncompromising intellectualism and scientific naturalism gave rise to his own unrivaled intellectual love of God. And, similarly, we may say that Rav Kook made the Kookian movement from affirmation to negation, insofar as his "enlightened conception of God," while purifying his own *previous* passion and devotion to God, his *previous* natural, intuitive faith, did not diminish the force of that passion and faith in the slightest.

The title of my paper, "The Love of God in Maimonides and Rav Kook," is ambiguous. It can either refer to the *concept* of the love of God in the *thought* of Maimonides and Rav Kook; or, it can refer to the *actual* love of God, that union of affirmation and negation, enthusiasm and enlightenment, passion and purity, strength and light, whatever the directional movement, in the very persons of Maimonides and Rav Kook. But, as should now be obvious, the two meanings are one and the same.<sup>48</sup>

## NOTES

1. On the emergence of an "heroic image" of Maimonides, see Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 45-46. For varying perceptions of Maimonides in the modern period, see James Lehman, "Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and the Me'asfim," in *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, vol. 20 (1975), pp. 87-108; and Jay Harris, "The Image of Maimonides in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Historiography," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 54 (1987), pp. 117-139.

2. "Rav Kook and the Jewish Philosophical Tradition," in *Rabbi Abraham Kook and Jewish Spirituality*, edited by Lawrence Kaplan and David Shatz, to be published by New York University Press.

3. See in particular, "Le- 'Ahduto shel ha-Rambam: Ma'amar Meyuhad," in Zev Yavetz, *Toledot*

*Yisrael*, vol. 12 (Tel Aviv, 1935), pp. 211-219; reprinted in *Ma'amare ha-Re'iyah* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 105-112. This essay was written as a response to Yavetz's criticisms of Maimonides' philosophic views as expressed in the *Guide*, which views Yavetz contrasted with Maimonides' "authentically" Jewish views as expressed in the *Mishneh Torah*. In his essay, Rav Kook argued that Maimonides' thought, both in the *Guide* and the *Mishneh Torah*, is of a piece and that all of it is authentically Jewish. "Heaven forbid," Rav Kook exclaimed, "that we should say that our great master . . . was divided against himself, and that the spirit animating the *Guide* differs from the spirit to be found in his other works!" (Rav Kook's disciple, Rabbi Benjamin Menashe Lewin, the editor of volume 12 of Yavetz's *Toledot Yisrael*, gave Rav Kook access to Yavetz's manuscript before it was published, and he incorporated Rav Kook's response as a special appendix to the volume.) See, as well, "*Ha-Yesodot ha-Kozevim shel Mevake ha-Mikra*," in *Ma'amare ha-Re'iyah*, p. 470.

4. I discuss this matter at some length in my essay "Rav Kook and the Jewish Philosophical Tradition" (above, note 2).

5. In truth, however, Maimonides was born in 1138 and not 1135. See S. Z. Havlin, "*Le-Toledot ha-Rambam*," *Daat*, vol. 15 (1985), pp. 70-79.

6. *Ha-Aretz*, Passover eve, 1935, reprinted several times, most recently in *Ma'amarei ha-Re'iyah*, pp. 113-117, and *Zikhron Re'iyah*, edited by Y. Rafael (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 1-4. (All page references are to *Ma'amare ha-Re'iyah*.)

7. "*Derekh ha-Tehiyah*," originally published in *Ha-Nir*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1906; reprinted in *Ma'amare ha-Re'iyah*, pp. 1-9; translated into English by B.Z. Bokser, "The Road to Renewal," in *Abraham Isaac Kook* (New York, 1978), pp. 287-302.

8. "*Ha-Ma'or ha-Ehad*," p. 114.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

12. This is the theme of the *Guide*, III:51, that great chapter which is not only one of the peaks of medieval—nay, of all—Jewish philosophy, but also one of the clearest, purest, and most intense expressions in all Jewish—and world—literature of the knowledge and love of God. Cf. *Laws of Repentance*, chapter 10.

13. "*Derekh ha-Tehiyah*," pp. 1-4 [= "Road to Renewal," pp. 287-293]; "*Al Gere ha-Tzedek*," *Ma'amare ha-Re'iyah*, pp. 200-202; "*Orot ha-'Emunah*," edited by Rabbi Moshe Gurwitz (Jerusalem, 1985), pp. 72-88; and "*Orot ha-Kodesh*," vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 392.

14. I discuss this point at length and with full documentation in an as yet unpublished essay, "The Light and the Strength: The Unity of Intellectual Purity and Religious Passion in the Thought of Rav Kook."

15. A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the 1992 conference of the Association of Jewish Studies. In the course of a very lively and vigorous discussion following the presentation, Drs. Shulamit Bruckstein, Allan Lazaroff, Natalie Polzer, and Roslyn Weiss raised two fundamental objections to my characterization of the movement from knowledge to love in Maimonides as being a movement from negation to affirmation. First, in what sense does the knowledge of God in Maimonides constitute a principle of negation? Second, if we are looking for a principle of negation in Maimonides' thought, ought we not find it in his conception of the fear of God? If this is so, then the movement from love to fear, as described for instance in *The Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*, 2:2, would constitute a "Kookian" movement from affirmation to negation, but one very different from that envisaged by Rav Kook. With respect to the first objection, I would argue that knowledge of God can be viewed as a principle of negation for Maimonides, since true knowledge of God requires the negation of an earlier imaginative conception of God. As Maimonides states, "When a man grows perfect and the mysteries of the Torah are revealed to him . . . he represents these matters which had appeared to him as imaginings and parables in their true essence" (*Guide*, I: 33 [pp. 71-72]). (All page references are to the translation of Shlomo Pines in the University of Chicago edition of the *Guide*.) With respect to the second objection, I believe that the fear of God constitutes a principle of limit in Maimonides' thought, but not a principle of negation. The passionate desire to know God that constitutes the love of God encounters insuperable barriers, barriers that give rise to the experience of fear, but this experience does not negate anything in the experience of love, in the drive to know God that had preceded it. A full analysis of the relationship of the fear of God to both the knowledge and love of God in the thought of Maimonides and Rav Kook requires a separate discussion, however, and must be reserved for another time. Despite the fact that I cannot accept their objections, I would, however, like to thank Drs. Bruckstein, Lazaroff, Polzer, and Weiss for their perceptive and challenging observations, which compelled me to rethink and further clarify my analysis.

16. See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "U-Vikashtem mi-Sham," *Ish ha-Halakhah: Galui ve-Nistar* (Jerusalem, 1979), note 2 (bottom of p. 123): "Maimonides, instead of concerning himself with intellectualized passion (*hegyon ha-lev*), focused upon the pathos of intellect (*levaviyut ha-higgayon*)."

17. *Orot ha-Kodesh*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem, 1950), p. 144. See Shmuel Livneh, "Perakim mi-Torat ha-Nistar," in *Zikhron Re'iyah*, pp. 87-88, for a discussion of Rav Kook's concept of "Ha-Tom ha-Penimi" and for a comparison of Rav Kook's views with those of Maimonides.

18. *Guide*, I:1-2; III:27, 51, 54.

19. *Ibid.*, III:51 (p. 621).

20. See, for example, *Olat Re'iyah*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1962), p. 3: "There is a love [for God] that is felt within the soul that derives from the very exalted rank of the soul to love the wholly good. This . . . love is fundamental and is more precious than any [other] love . . ."

21. See *Iggerot Re'iyah*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 43 (letter 44 to Rabbi Samuel Alexandrov).

22. "Letter on the Truth and Holiness of the Wisdom of the Kabbalah," *Ma'amarei ha-Re'iyah*, p. 520.

23. See my essay, "Rav Kook and the Jewish Philosophical Tradition" (above, note 2).

24. Alfred Ivry, "Providence, Divine Omniscience, and Possibility: The Case of Maimonides," in *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, edited by T. Rudavsky (Boston, 1985), pp. 148-149.

25. *Guide*, I:69 (pp. 168-170).

26. *Ibid.*, III:10 (p. 440).

27. *Ibid.*, I:69 (p. 169); *Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*, 1:1-4.

28. Ivry, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

29. I am not referring here to a person's rational faculty which is his or her natural form (*Guide*, I:1 [p. 22], 41 [p. 91]; *Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*, 4:8), but to his or her intellect which, as Maimonides states in one place, is the form of the "person perfect in knowledge" (*Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*, 4:8) or, as he states in another place, "the form of the soul" (*Laws of Repentance*, 8:3), i.e., the form of the rational faculty. The rational faculty is a person's image, the intellect is his or her image of God. A person is, therefore, born only with an image; his image of God, he must acquire through intellectual cognition (*Guide*, I:1 [p. 22]; III:8 [pp. 431-432]; *Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*, 4:8). Furthermore, a person's rational faculty is a bodily faculty, "a faculty consisting in preparedness" (*Guide*, I:70 [p. 174]); only his intellect is "not a faculty in the body, but truly separate from the organic body and overflows toward it" (*Guide*, I:72 [p. 193]). It follows, then, that, upon a person's death, the rational faculty perishes along with him; only the intellect is immortal (*Guide*, I:40 [p. 90], 41 [p. 91], 70 [pp. 173-74]; III:8 [p. 431], 27 [p. 511], 51 [pp. 618, 627-28], 54 [p. 635]; *Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*, 4:9; *Laws of Repentance*, 8:3). In a word, a person's immortal image of God, i.e., his intellect, is not an endowment but an achievement. See Sarah Klein-Braslavy, *Perush ha-Rambam le-Sippurim 'al Adam be-Parashat Bereshit* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 13-18, 28-36; my essay, "'I Sleep but my Heart Waketh': Maimonides' Conception of Human Perfection," in *The Thought of Moses Maimonides*, edited by I. Robinson, et. al. (Lewiston, 1990), note 20 (pp. 152-153); and the profound observations of my teacher and master, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, o.b.m., in *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 123-128, 131-132.

30. *Guide*, I:3 (p. 27), 68 (pp. 163-165), 73: A Call upon the Reader's Attention (p. 209); III:8 (pp. 431-32), 27 (p. 511), 54 (p. 635).

31. See *Orot ha-Kodesh*, vol. 2. "He-Hayyut ha-'Olamit" (pp. 329-370); and "Ha-'Ahdut ha-Kollelet," pp. 391-447. See, as well, Rav Kook's famous poem, "Lahashe ha-Havayah" ("Whispers of Existence"), in *Sinai*, vol. 17 (1945), p. 15. (An English translation of this poem with an extensive and penetrating commentary may be found in Jerome Gellman's essay, "Poetry of Spirituality," *Daat*, vol. 26 [Winter, 1991], pp. v-xxxi.)

32. The Bible states that "Solomon loved the Lord" (1 Kings 3:3), but while the noun form is used for Abraham ('Avraham 'ohavi), only a verbal form is used for Solomon (va-ye'ahav Shelomo).

33. *Iggerot ha-Re'iyah*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 43 (letter 379).

34. *Laws of the Foundations of the Torah*, 2:2; *Laws of Repentance*, 10:6.

35. *Laws of Repentance*, 10:2.

36. *Laws of Idolatry*, 1:3.

37. *Laws of Repentance*, 10:2; *Guide* III:51 (pp. 623-624).

38. *Guide*, III:24 (pp. 500-501).

39. See above, note 33.

40. Genesis Rabbah, 39:1. According to this midrash, Abraham may be compared "to a man who was travelling from place to place when he saw a palace full of light (*doleket*). 'Is it possible that

this palace has no ruler?" he wondered. Until the owner of the palace looked at him and said: 'I am the owner of the palace.' Similarly, Abraham our father, wondered: 'Is it possible that the world has no ruler?' The Holy One, blessed be He, looked at him and said: 'I am the owner of the world.'"

Whether or not this midrash should be seen as referring to Abraham's discovery of God through reflection on the order and design of nature depends upon the meaning of the key word, *doleket*. Does it mean "full of light"? Or, does, it mean "in flames"? See the standard commentaries on the Midrash Rabbah for varying views on this question, in particular pseudo-Rashi, *Maharzu* (R. Zev Wolf Einhorn) and *Hiddushei Radal* (R. David Luria). Among modern thinkers who interpret this midrash as referring to a type of cosmological proof of God, an argument from motion or design, obviously in a loose sense, are R. Nahman Krochmal, *Moreh Nevukhe ha-Zeman*, p. 21 (who understands *doleket* as referring to *nerot dolkot*, "lit candles") and R. Zadok Ha-kohen, *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik* (Lublin, 1913), p. 70. Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel, in *God in Search of Man* (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 113, note 7, points to the ambiguity of the word *doleket* and perceptively comments that "the parable is significant in both senses [of the word]." On p. 112 he interprets the parable on the basis of *doleket*, meaning "full of light"; on p. 367 he interprets it on the basis of *doleket*, meaning "in flames." Even if, however, we interpret *doleket* as meaning "in flames" and deny that this midrash refers to Abraham's discovery of God through meditating on the order of nature, this type of cosmic discovery of God on the part of Abraham is amply testified to in other midrashic and, indeed, ancient non-rabbinic texts. See the many sources cited in Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia, 1925), p. 210, note 16.

41. For an approach to Rav Kook's understanding of the Akedah similar to our own, and also drawing upon his discussion in '*Orot ha-'Emunah*, see Jerome Gellman, "Poetry of Spirituality" (above, note 30), pp. xix-xxi; and *idem*, "Illuminating Faith," in *Jewish Action*, vol. 48, no. 1 (Winter 1987-88), pp. 75-78.

42. '*Orot ha-'Emunah*, p. 87. For an explication of this passage, see R. Moshe Tzuriel, '*Ozarot ha-Re'iyah* (Tel Aviv, 1988), p. 659.

43. See the discussion in Part I and, in particular, note 15.

44. Note that in *Laws of Idolatry*, 1:3, Maimonides, when speaking of Abraham's discovery of God, does not refer to divine revelation.

45. Genesis Rabbah, 39:8; cf. Maimonides, *Laws of Idolatry*, 1:3. For Maimonides, unlike for Rav Kook, Abraham's worship of idols "together with his father and mother and the rest of the people" would seem to have been a matter of political conformity on his part, "until he attained the way of truth and understood the path of righteousness."

46. '*Orot ha-'Emunah*, p. 77.

47. Thus, Rav Kook, after paraphrasing this midrash, states: "The faith which lies deep in the dark element of the soul, that faith which remains with man from the dawning of the dew of his youth [again an allusion to Abraham]—[L.K.] is a sign of a healthy soul in which the sensitive attentiveness of faith (*hakshavat ha-'emunah*) is strong and natural, serious and true. This faith cannot be impaired by any foreign inclination (*netiyah zarah*) nor can it be weakened by fear in the form of despair. But this psychic strength, in the deepest strata [of the soul], continues to flow until cognition will arise and be united with it. Then the light of the supernal faith will begin to shine."

48. This paper had its origins in a talk I gave in February 1991 at Midreshet Lindenbaum (Brovender's), Jerusalem, where I was visiting my daughter Pearl who was studying there for the academic year. I would like to thank Dr. David Bernstein, the executive director of Midreshet Lindenbaum, for his invitation and kind hospitality.

It was truly a privilege for me to address a group of young women, most of them from the Diaspora, who, during the difficult period of the Gulf War and the Scud-missile attacks, not only maintained but intensified their dual commitment to the study of Torah and the service of the land, people, and state of Israel, a dual commitment which, in truth, is a single, unified commitment. While the Scud-missile crisis, as was widely noted, served, in general, to highlight and even exacerbate the divisions between Diaspora and Israeli Jews, it only served to bring together the Israeli and Diaspora students in Midreshet Lindenbaum—and in other, similar midrashot and yeshivot—in a feeling of oneness, arising out of an awareness and a knowledge of a common fate and destiny, of a common goal and purpose, of common values and ideals. It is perhaps ironic, given Maimonides' well-known contempt for the intellectual and spiritual capabilities of women—and, to be fair, of most men as well—that it was precisely among the young women to whom I spoke at Midreshet Lindenbaum, including my daughter, that I was able to discern some indication of that spirit of religious passion and devotion combined with intellectual rigor and openness which I discuss in this paper. But, then—again to be fair—Maimonides did admit the possibility that even women might be able to serve God out of love! See *Laws of Repentance*, 10:1,5.

# *The Quest for the Lost Princess: Transition and Change in Jewish Lore*

HOWARD SCHWARTZ

On the day of Yom Kippur the decision is made on high as to whether or not each person's name will be sealed in the Book of Life. Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed, known as the Ari, was able to divine the future, and he always knew from Yom Kippur who, among his disciples, would live or die. This knowledge he rarely disclosed, but once, when he learned there was a way to avert the decree, he made an exception. Summoning Rabbi Abraham Beruchim, he said: "Know that a heavenly voice has gone forth to announce that this will be your last year among us—unless you do what is necessary to abolish the decree."

"What must I do?" asked Rabbi Abraham.

"Know, then," said the Ari, "that your only hope is to go to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and there pray with all your heart before God. And if you are deemed worthy you will have a vision of the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Presence. That will mean that the decree has been averted and your name will be inscribed in the Book of Life after all."

Rabbi Abraham thanked the Ari with all his heart and left to prepare for the journey. First, he shut himself in his house for three days and nights, wearing sackcloth and ashes, and fasted the whole time. Then, although he could have gone by wagon or by donkey, he chose to walk to Jerusalem. And by the time Rabbi Abraham reached Jerusalem, he felt as if he were floating, as if his soul had ascended from his body. And when he reached the Wailing Wall, the last remnant of Solomon's Temple, Rabbi Abraham had a vision there. Out of the wall came an old woman, dressed in black, deep in mourning. And Rabbi Abraham suddenly realized how deep was the grief of the *Shekhinah* over the destruction of the Temple and the scattering of her children, Israel, all over the world. And he became possessed of a grief as deep as the ocean, far greater than he had ever known. It was the grief of a mother who has lost a child; the grief of Hannah, after losing her seven sons; the grief of the Bride over the suffering of her children scattered to every corner of the earth.

At that moment Rabbi Abraham fell to the ground in a faint, and he had a vision. In the vision he saw the *Shekhinah* once more, but this time he saw her dressed in her robe woven out of light, more magnificent than the setting sun, and her joyful countenance was revealed. Waves of light arose from her face, an

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HOWARD SCHWARTZ is Professor of English at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He has published three books of poetry and several books of fiction, including *Adam's Soul*. He has also edited a four-volume set of *Jewish folktales*, which includes *Elijah's Violin & Other Jewish Folktales*, *Miriam's Tambourine: Jewish Folktales from Around the World*, *Lilith's Cave: Jewish Folktales and the Supernatural*, and, most recently, *Gabriel's Palace: Jewish Mystical Tales*. The present article was delivered as the keynote address at a conference entitled "*Tides of Life*," sponsored by Spertus College of Judaica and the C.C. Jung Institute, both of Chicago.



aura that seemed to reach out and surround him, as if he were cradled in the arms of the Sabbath Queen. "Do not grieve so, my son Abraham," she said. "Know that my exile will come to an end, and my inheritance will not go to waste. And for you, my son, there shall be a great many blessings."

Just then Rabbi Abraham's soul returned to him from its journey on high. He awoke refreshed, as if he had shed years of grief, and he was filled with hope.

When Rabbi Abraham returned to Safed he was a new man, and when the Ari saw him, he said at once: "I can see that you have been found worthy to see the *Shekhinah*, and you can rest assured that you will live for another twenty-two years. Know that each year will be the blessing of another letter of the alphabet, for the light of the Divine Presence shines forth through every letter. And you, who have stood face to face with the *Shekhinah*, will recognize that light in every letter of every word."

So it was that Rabbi Abraham did live for another twenty-two years, years filled with abundance. And all who saw him recognized the aura that shone from his face, for the light of the Divine Presence always reflected from his eyes.

THIS TALE, "A VISION AT THE WAILING WALL," DERIVES from the city of Safed in the sixteenth century. It is one of a cycle of tales about the great Jewish mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the Ari. Here the Ari perceives that one of his disciples faces a mid-life transition and sends him on a journey to wholeness, a quest to the Western Wall, the last remaining wall of the Temple in Jerusalem, to plead mercy from the *Shekhinah*, who is identified in the Kabbalah as the Bride of God. There Rabbi Abraham has a vision of the *Shekhinah*, in which he first sees her as an old woman who emerges from the wall "dressed in black, deep in mourning." Soon after this he faints and has a vision of the *Shekhinah* as a celestial bride.

Central to understanding this mystical tale is the concept of the *Shekhinah*. The term is first found in the Talmud, codified in the fifth century, where it refers to the Divine Presence, that is, the presence of God in the world. It is linked, in particular, to the sacred quality of the Sabbath. But by the sixteenth century the meaning of the term *shekhinah* had considerably evolved. It came to be identified with the feminine aspect of the Divinity, and took on mythic independence. Myths can be found in the Zohar and other kabbalistic texts that portray the *Shekhinah* as the Bride of God and Sabbath Queen who once made her home in the Temple in Jerusalem and later, when the Temple was destroyed, went into exile with her children, Israel. At this point the mythic figure of the *Shekhinah* becomes entirely independent of the divinity and takes on a separate identity. Nor will her exile end until the Temple has been rebuilt, which Jewish lore links with the coming of the Messiah, since the rebuilding of the Temple is said to be one of the miracles that will occur in the messianic era.

The two appearances of the *Shekhinah* that Rabbi Abraham envisions at the Wall, that of the old woman in mourning and of the bride in white, are the two primary aspects associated with her: she appears as a bride or queen or lost princess in some texts and tales and as an old woman mourning over the de-

struction of the Temple in others. In this tale she appears in both primary forms, signifying that his encounter with her is complete.

From our perspective, the *Shekhinah* can be recognized both as a mythic and archetypal feminine figure, very close to the purest vision of Jung's concept of the Anima, the symbolic feminine aspect of every man. In "The Vision at the Wailing Wall" the Ari recognizes that if Rabbi Abraham continues on his present path, he is going to shortly meet his death. That is to say, his life has reached a dangerous transition, and in order to survive it, he must undertake an extraordinary task. Therefore the Ari sends him on a quest to find the *Shekhinah* in the logical place where she could be found, the Wailing Wall, the remnant of her former home. Rabbi Abraham encounters her there both as a grieving old woman and as a radiant bride, and afterward he is a new man, who through this visionary experience has rediscovered his lost Anima and reintegrated his feminine side. That is why he is able to live for another twenty-two years, one year for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, representing a whole new cycle of his life.

There is much we can learn from this tale about how to read rabbinic tales to discover the psychic truths at the core of them. First, however, it is necessary to learn how to interpret their symbolic language. In identifying the *Shekhinah* with the Anima we have taken the first step toward translating this language into an archetypal framework.

The next step is to recognize that the quest of Rabbi Abraham is primarily an inner one. After all, as the Ari makes very clear to him, he must save himself. All the actions he undertakes, from wearing sackcloth and mourning to walking to Jerusalem, are mystical techniques intended to put him in a proper state of mind to receive the vision at the Wailing Wall. In this sense he might be seen as not only preparing himself for the vision, but of inducing it as well. Or the Ari can be seen as having planted the seed of the vision when he sent him on the quest. This quest and its corresponding vision, although expressed in terms of religious symbolism, is essentially an exploration of the world within.

Indeed, the folk structure that best expresses the essence of transition is that of the quest. That is because the quest represents the inner journey that must be taken before the transition can be completed. It is no accident that as many as half of all fairy tales are quest tales. This is also true of Jewish fairy tales. It is significant that the most famous Jewish quest tale, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav's "The Lost Princess," concerns a quest to find a princess whom the disciples of Rabbi Nachman readily identify as the *Shekhinah*. More than any other tale, this one presents the myth of the *Shekhinah* in fairy-tale terms that make it universally recognizable.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav holds a unique place in Jewish lore. The great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, he is widely acclaimed as the greatest storyteller of all time. "The Lost Princess" was the first story he told to his Hasidim when he began to tell stories. There are thirteen primary tales in all

and a few dozen other scattered tales.

On the surface the tale of “The Lost Princess” appears to be a conventional fairy tale, and as such it is a compelling tale. But it was actually intended to serve as an allegory of a primary Jewish myth, that of the exile of the *Shekhinah*. It was Rabbi Nachman’s method to disguise his mythic, kabbalistic tales in the form of intricate fairy tales, with many tales within tales, about kings and queens, princes and princesses. He hinted that he did this in order to conceal the mysteries revealed in these tales, mysteries that his Hasidim knew how to probe, by examining their symbolism and translating it to the appropriate mystical doctrine.

This, in brief, is the tale of the “The Lost Princess”:

There once was a king who had six sons and one daughter. His daughter was especially dear to him, but one day he became angry with her and said, “Go to the Devil!” and the next day she was gone. The heartbroken king then sent his most loyal minister on a quest to find her, giving him all that he might need to accomplish the quest, including a servant. The minister searched everywhere in the world, but failed to find the princess. At last he came to a remote palace where he discovered her, and he managed to talk to her. She told him that she was being held captive in the palace of the Evil One, who took her when the king sent her to him, and that in order to set her free, the minister must long for her release for a year, and at the end of that year fast for one day, neither eating nor drinking, and then she would be able to return to her father, the king.

The minister remained there for a year, longing for her freedom, but on the last day, when he was supposed to be fasting, he saw an apple on a tree that was so appealing that he picked and ate it. After this he fell asleep and slept for seventy years. At the end of this time he awoke and was told by his servant of his long sleep. Then, heartbroken, he returned to the lost princess, who told him to repeat the year of longing, but this time he was permitted to eat—but not to drink—on the last day. He repeated the year-long vigil, but on the last day he saw that the waters of a familiar spring had turned red, and he could not resist tasting them. They turned out to be a delicious wine, and he drank his fill and once again fell asleep.

This time, while he was sleeping, the princess left the palace of the Evil One and rode past him in a carriage. She got out of the carriage and tried to wake him, but when she could not, she wept into her scarf and left it with him. When he finally awoke seventy years later, his loyal servant told him all that had taken place, and showed him the scarf. He held it up to the sun and discovered that the tears of the lost princess had written a message on the scarf, in which she told him that henceforth she could be found in a palace of pearls on a golden mountain.

So it was that the heartbroken minister set out on a second quest, which turned out to be far more arduous than the first, because no one he met had ever heard of a palace of pearls on a golden mountain. He searched for many years, and his quest brought him at to a great desert, where he encountered three giants, the giant in charge of the animals, the one in charge of the birds, and the one in charge of the winds, all of whom were brothers. These giants called together the animals, the birds, and the winds, but none had heard of the palace of pearls. At last a late wind arrived, and when rebuked by the giant for being late, it explained that it had been carrying a princess to that very palace of pearls.

The giant then gave the minister an enchanted bag with an endless supply of

gold, and ordered the wind to bring him to the foot of that mountain. There the story ends, with Rabbi Nachman's assurance that eventually the minister did free the princess, although he does not reveal how this took place.

I think you will agree that this appears in all respects to be a characteristic fairy tale, with a king, a lost princess, a quest, three giants, and an enchanted palace. As such, it can be interpreted from a Jungian perspective as a universal fairy tale, where the quest for the lost princess can readily be recognized as an inner journey. This is also the essential Jewish meaning of the tale, when the symbols in it are translated into their Jewish equivalents.

Such an interpretation can be found in the traditional Bratslaver commentaries on "The Lost Princess." For this tale, and the others that Rabbi Nachman told, were examined by his Hasidim with the kind of intense scrutiny reserved for the sacred texts. It was an article of faith with them that his stories could best be understood allegorically, and indeed "The Lost Princess" lends itself to such an interpretation. The key is the king who has six sons and one daughter. The king is easily recognizable as God, who is traditionally represented as a king in a multitude of rabbinic parables. The six sons and one daughter can readily be identified as the six days of the week and the Sabbath. And the identification of the Sabbath with a princess naturally evokes the Sabbath Queen, which, along with that of the Bride, is one of the primary identities of the *Shekhinah*.

We also readily note the symbolism of the apple in the story that the minister picks. It recalls the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden, and in eating it on the final fast day, he repeats the sin of the Fall and must wait for another generation, symbolized by the seventy years he sleeps. Indeed, the stages of the story can be seen to represent the biblical chronology. The princess is linked to the seven days of creation. The episode of the Garden of Eden is echoed by the eating of the apple. The episode of the water turning into wine can be linked with the story of the Flood and the sin of Noah in becoming drunk. Also, the three giants that the minister encounters in the desert can be identified as the three towering patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So too does the quest of the minister in searching for the palace of pearls repeat the wandering of the Israelites in search of the Holy Land. As for the scarf with the words written by the tears of the lost princess, it represents the sacred writings of the Torah. These symbolic parallels to the biblical chronology demonstrate that "The Lost Princess" can also be understood as reflecting the collective Jewish experience, reliving the archetypal experiences represented in these key biblical episodes. That such a collective interpretation of the text was intended is found in the Haggadah for Passover, where it is stated that "In every generation each person must regard himself as if he himself went forth out of Egypt."

So too can this seminal story be understood on the level of personal inner experience. Once the link has been perceived between the lost princess and the *Shekhinah*, the allegorical meaning of Rabbi Nachman's tale reveals itself as a

fairy-tale retelling of the myth of the exile of the *Shekhinah*. The king's angry words which result in the disappearance of the lost princess are equivalent to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the subsequent exile of both the *Shekhinah* and the Children of Israel. At the same time they are equivalent to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the wandering in the wilderness, and other variations of the myth of exile, which is another of the primary Jewish myths.

Thus the figure of the lost princess in Rabbi Nachman's tale can be recognized as an Anima figure. As such, she represents, in personal terms, a crucial missing element in the psychic equation, which the quest of the minister seeks to restore; while in collective terms the exile of the *Shekhinah* can be seen as a psychic dislocation of the Jewish nation brought about by their exile from the Promised Land.

Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov, Rabbi Nachman's scribe, confirms the identification of the lost princess with the *Shekhinah* in the introduction to *Sippure Ma'asiyot*, Rabbi Nachman's primary volume of his tales:

Behold, the story of the princess who is lost is the mystery of the *Shekhinah* in exile. . . . And this story is about every man in every time, for this entire story occurs to every man individually, for everyone of Israel must occupy himself with this *tikkun* (act of redemption or restoration), namely to raise up the *Shekhinah* from her exile, to raise her up from the dust, and to liberate the Holy Kingdom from among the idolaters and the Other Side among whom she has been caught. . . . Thus one finds that everyone in Israel is occupied with the search for the lost princess, to take her back to her father, for Israel as a whole has the character of the minister who searches for her.

The significance of Rabbi Nathan's comment that "everyone in Israel is occupied with the search for the lost princess" should not be missed. Here is the clearest statement indicating that the process of searching for the lost princess, who is identified with the *Shekhinah* and thus with the Anima, is an inner one. Here we must marvel at the psychological insight of Rabbi Nachman and Rabbi Nathan. It is clear from Rabbi Nathan's statement that the allegorical nature of Rabbi Nachman's tale is presumed, and thus recognition of a complex symbol system linked not only to a mystical theology, but to an inner quest that "everyone of Israel is occupied with."

Let us now consider the identity of the loyal minister. Here there are three strong possibilities. The minister can be identified with the *tzaddik*, the righteous one, who must search and find the lost princess and bring her back to the king, thus, to God. Or the minister can be identified with the nation of Israel whose task it is to search for the lost princess, representing the *Shekhinah*, in her exile. Or the minister can be identified with the Messiah, and here the linkage seems quite natural. For kabbalistic myth holds that the exile of the *Shekhinah* will not end until the Temple is rebuilt, and this, in turn, is not destined to take place until the advent of the Messiah. And the reason "The



Lost Princess” is left unfinished is because the Messiah has not yet come.

All three of these interpretations of the role of the minister seem quite accurate, and each permits the tale to be seen from another important perspective. When the minister is seen as the nation of Israel, the responsibility for finding the lost princess rests on every Jew, and the importance of this doctrine to each individual is emphasized. When the minister is viewed as a *tzaddik*, the key role of the *tzaddik* in bringing about the reunion of *Shekhinah* and Messiah is underscored. And by identifying the minister with the Messiah we can recognize that Rabbi Nachman has combined two primary Jewish myths, that of the *Shekhinah* and that of the Messiah, into one mythic fairy tale, demonstrating their interdependence. Nor is it necessary to narrow these interpretations down to one. One of the beautiful things about the process of commentary in Jewish texts is that multiple readings are not only permitted, they are encouraged, and thus we can easily accept the legitimacy of all three interpretations.

As for the Jungian symbolism of the coming of the Messiah, it can be identified with the individual’s process of psychic growth—the Individuation process. Just as this is an ongoing process, so too is the waiting for the Messiah, as is indicated in the twelfth of the Thirteen Principles of Maimonides: “I firmly believe in the coming of the Messiah, and although he may tarry, I daily wait for his coming.” Thus the messianic era represents the culmination of the series of transitions that constitute the history of the Jewish people, a time when all the people will have returned to a state of wholeness, and when the journey of the individual and that of the collective with each equal the journey to wholeness. We note also that both the *Shekhinah* and the Messiah are in exile, and therefore they have to be found and brought into consciousness. Also, it is apparent that the arrival of the messianic era will be the equivalent of a return to the Garden of Eden, since it involves a return to a prelapsarian condition. Therefore, arriving at the messianic era represents a full return to the beginning, the meaning of the Hebrew term *teshuvah*, which means both “return” and “repentance.” Such a return can also be viewed as a return to the primordial state we experienced at the beginning of our lives, which the Garden of Eden represents.

For the most part, the myths concerning the *Shekhinah* and the Messiah are separate, but they converge at the same conclusion, which is the End of Days. For one of the consequences of the coming of the Messiah will be a miraculous re-creation of the Temple, exactly as it was. Therefore the coming of the Messiah is essential to end the exile of the *Shekhinah*, and the two myths are eternally bound together.

There is another Hasidic tale that draws on the themes of the *Shekhinah* and the Messiah. This is a tale of Rabbi Eizik of Kallo, a famous Hungarian Hasidic master, called “The Sabbath Guests”:

Two traveling Hasidim arrived in the city of Kallo on the eve of the Sabbath and sought out the hospitality of the Rabbi of Kallo, about whom they had heard so

much. Already tales were being told of his miracles throughout Hungary, and the visiting Hasidim greatly anticipated spending the Sabbath in his company.

Soon everyone had gathered together to celebrate the Sabbath, and all looked toward the Tzaddik of Kallo for the signal to welcome the Sabbath Queen. But the Tzaddik did not stir. Not a single muscle moved. Every eye remained upon him, yet he seemed detached, in deep concentration.

The visiting Hasidim were startled at such behavior, for no one ever delayed the beginning of the Sabbath for even an instant. Could it be that the rabbi had lost track of time?

All at once there was a knocking at the door, and when it was opened a couple came in. The young man was dressed in a white robe, as was worn in the city of Safed. The young woman, who was also wearing white, was hauntingly beautiful, with very dark eyes, her head covered with a white scarf. The Tzaddik rose, at the same time signaling for the Sabbath to begin. The Hasidim began singing *Lekha dodi*, the song that welcomes the Sabbath Queen, as the Rabbi of Kallo went to meet his guests. He treated them with every kindness, paying as much attention to the woman as to the man. This was too much for the visiting Hasidim, but they were guests, and there was nothing they could do.

After the meal the Rabbi of Kallo rose and said: "This couple has come here to be wed this day. And I have agreed to marry them." Now these words were a deep shock to the visiting Hasidim, for weddings are forbidden on the Sabbath. And they began reciting psalms to themselves, to protect themselves from the desecration of the Sabbath. At that moment the Rabbi of Kallo turned to the two Hasidim and addressed them. He said: "Of course, the consent of everyone present is necessary, if the wedding is to be performed. Please tell us if we may have your consent." And there was almost a pleading tone in his voice.

Now it is one thing to witness such a desecration, and quite another to perform one. But the two Hasidim did not dare turn the Tzaddik down to his face. Instead they each dropped their eyes and continued reciting psalms, and a great fear was in their hearts.

At last, when they raised their eyes, they saw that the couple was gone. The Rabbi of Kallo was slumped in his chair. For a long time there was silence. At last the rabbi said: "Do you know who they were?" Each of the visiting Hasidim shook his head to say no. And the rabbi said: "He was the Messiah. She was the Sabbath Queen. For so many years of exile they have sought each other, and now they were together at last, and they wanted to be wed. And, as everyone knows, on the day of their wedding our exile will come to an end. But that is possible only if everyone gives his full assent. Unfortunately, you did not, and the wedding could not take place."

In this tale of Rabbi Eizik of Kallo, the Messiah and the *Shekhinah* arrive unexpectedly at his house on the Sabbath as a couple who wish to wed. The Rabbi of Kallo recognizes who they are, but the visiting Hasidim do not, and because of their blindness, the opportunity to bring the messianic era is lost. Just as Rabbi Nachman's tale of "The Lost Princess" brings together two myths, that of the *Shekhinah* and that of the Messiah, and links them together, so does this tale identify the pair as a bride and groom, suggesting that their union would herald the End of Days, the rabbinic vision of the messianic era. In a sense this tale of Rabbi Eizik makes the convergence of the two myths of the *Shekhinah* and the Messiah complete, as symbolized by their desire for union.

Such mythic fusion is common, and often results in the creation of a new myth.

From a Jungian perspective, this tale seems to advocate the fusion of the male and female “inner beings,” as represented by the *Shekhinah* and the Messiah. Such a union can be viewed as the full integration of the male and female archetypal figures, and a symbol of psychic wholeness. Unfortunately, the tale tells us, the marriage has not taken place because you, the visitor to the realm of the unconscious, haven’t given your approval for it. Thus the conclusion of the story can be interpreted as if it were a dream, reporting the present state of psychic balance. From this perspective the story reports a lost opportunity for psychic unity, while from the traditional perspective it is a tale of why the Messiah has not yet come. Such stories explain how there are opportunities in every generation for the Messiah to come, if something does not go wrong. And there are a many such tales, for the longing for the Messiah was very great.

That the quest of uniting the *Shekhinah* and Messiah is primarily an inner one is well illustrated by the concept of *tikkun*, meaning “redemption” or “restoration.” This is the very term that Rabbi Nathan, Rabbi Nachman’s scribe, links to the exile of the *Shekhinah* when he says that “everyone of Israel must occupy himself with this *tikkun*.” Here *tikkun* is directly understood as an internal process, one of healing and repair, and it is understood that it takes place on a personal level and a collective one at the same time. That is why it is known as *tikkun ‘olam*, repair of the world.

The concept of *tikkun* is itself the subject of a vivid myth deriving from the sixteenth century, which was the last major myth to be added to Jewish tradition. This myth, created by the same Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the Ari, who sent Rabbi Abraham on his fateful quest, represents the core of the Ari’s teachings, and his greatest gift to Jewish tradition. It illustrates the Jewish vision of the very process of restoration and transformation. According to this cosmological myth, God sent forth vessels bearing a primordial light at the beginning of time. Had these vessels arrived intact, the world would have remained in its prelapsarian condition. But somehow—no one knows why—the vessels shattered and scattered their sparks throughout the world, especially on the Holy Land. This is the first stage of the Ari’s cosmology, known as “The Shattering of the Vessels.” It is the symbolic equivalent of other cosmic catastrophes such as the expulsion from Eden or the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem—or, the expulsion of the Jews in Spain in 1492, which took place just thirty years before the Ari was born.

The second phase—and it is the existence of this second phase that makes the myth so remarkable—is called “Gathering the Sparks.” Here the object is to collect the fallen sparks and raise them up. This is the very definition of the process of *tikkun*, of healing a world that has become unraveled. The process of raising up the scattered sparks involves the first explanation and justification of the ritual requirements specified in the Torah, known as the *mitzvot*. Each time one of the *mitzvot* is fulfilled, according to the Ari, scattered sparks are

raised up and redeemed. Ultimately, when enough sparks have been gathered, the broken vessels will be restored, and this is the symbolic equivalent of the messianic era. Thus the myth of the Ari states unambiguously that a person's deeds serve directly to transform and restore the world. And at the same time, of course, this process of transformation occurs within them as well. Thus the Ari's myth is a healing one, focused on the processes of breaking apart and restoration.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the myth of the Ari is the way it too combines two primary Jewish myths, that of creation and that of the messianic era, into one. Rather than present a view of original sin, as is found in Catholicism, the blame for imperfections in the world is directly made the responsibility of God, removing much or all of the blame from the human realm. So too is the role of the Jews in the world here defined: they exist in order to gather the scattered holy sparks and raise them up. This memorable myth spread rapidly throughout the Jewish world and brought kabbalistic principles to the Jewish masses for the first time. Today it remains one of the most haunting and relevant of Jewish myths.

From a Jungian perspective, the shattering of the vessels might be identified in individual terms as the equivalent of a breakdown. It represents a breaking through of the unconscious at a time of psychic transition. On the collective level, the shattering of the vessels represents a time of upheaval, such as that resulting in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, or the expulsion from Spain in 1492—or one of dozens of crises in Jewish history. As for the gathering of the sparks, it represents the process of restoration both on the individual and collective levels that ultimately achieves the kind of psychic balance known as Individuation. And we note that the developmental sequence of the Ari's myth requires the shattering to take place before the restoration, indicating that the shattering is an essential phase of this process, as well as an inevitable one.

In both their teachings and their tales, the primary role of the master or *tzaddik* in Jewish tales is to guide his disciples on the path of the Torah. The myth of the Ari does this, explaining that following this path will result in personal and cosmic restoration. And in the tale of Rabbi Abraham, the matter is framed in terms of Yom Kippur and the long-established tradition that a person's future is decided on that day, while the quest on which the Ari sends him grows out of the myth of the exile of the *Shekhinah*. As a result, Rabbi Abraham survives a difficult and crucial transition in his life and emerges not only renewed, but, in a very real sense, reborn.

Thus it can be seen that the role of the *tzaddik* and that of the therapist are parallel. Just as the *tzaddik* brings his disciples to recognize their personal connection to Jewish myth, as in the story Rabbi Abraham's vision at the Wailing Wall, the therapist helps an individual recognize that others go through a similar process, and that the stages of personal experience that lead to Individuation are not only personal ones, but universal ones as well.

In the tale of Rabbi Abraham, the transition he is confronted with is identified as a matter of life and death, and this is often the case. By putting the transition in these terms, we can easily recognize its importance. In most of these tales the key events take place during times of transition, involve major life events such as birth, marriage, and death, and are often linked to one of the holy days. That is when Jews are subject more than at other times to divine judgment.

Judaism, of course, offers a multitude of rituals and ceremonies to ease and define life transitions. The ceremony of the *brit* (circumcision) adds an eight-day-old boy to the community of Israel; bar and bat mitzvah serve as initiations into adult life; an elaborate wedding service, followed by seven days of celebrating the *sheva berakhot* (seven blessings), leaves a couple feeling very married; and the extensive rituals linked to death, beginning with those of *shiva* (seven days of mourning) and continuing with the reciting of the *kaddish* for an eleven-month period, have the effect of providing consolation to the one who is grieving, and a meaningful structure at a time of chaos in their lives.

At the same time, Jewish tales portray a different kind of transition, one provoked by a time of danger, whether of inner or outer origin, in which the conventional ritual structure is not enough, and the presence of some kind of guide is required in order to survive. The figure who then miraculously appears is usually identified with one of the patriarchs or prophets, especially Elijah, who often appears in a time of dire need. Further, the kind of survival indicated in these tales often requires radical transformation of the self, in order to achieve the kind of psychic balance found in Individuation.

Consider this tale, "A Kiss from the Master," collected orally in Israel by the Israel Folktale Archives:

During the days when the cave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai was still open, the wise men of Safed would enter it on Lag Ba'omer. Once a rich man who was visiting in Safed on the eve of Lag Ba'omer was invited by his host to visit Rabbi Shimon's grave in Meron. When they arrived, he saw that the sages were sitting around the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, rejoicing. They invited the rich man to join them, and they gave the rich man an honorable place among them.

Then, one at a time, they read passages from the Zohar, as was their custom. But when the guest received the book, he had to put it down, for he could not read the Aramaic in which it was written, and he was deeply ashamed.

After they had finished reading, everyone but the rich man returned to their tents. But he remained in the cave, weeping bitterly for his lack of knowledge of the Torah, until at last he fell asleep. And no sooner did he sleep than he dreamed that Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai appeared to him in a dream and comforted him, and before he departed he kissed him on the mouth. And that is when the rich man woke up.

From the moment he opened his eyes, the rich man felt as if a new spirit were within him. He picked up the book of the Zohar and opened it to the first page. There he found, much to his amazement, that he could now read the Hebrew letters. Not only that, but the true meaning of every letter rose up in his vision,



for the spirit of Rabbi Shimon had joined his soul. In this way his eyes were opened to the hidden meanings of the Torah and its mysteries were revealed to him.

Later the others returned to the cave, and they began to discuss one difficult passage in the Zohar, which none of them could comprehend. Then, the rich man spoke and explained that passage to them as if it were elementary, and their eyes were opened to its true meaning. Even more, they were amazed at his wisdom, for they knew he could not even read the language and yet what he said could only come from a master of the Torah.

Then the sages demanded that the rich man explain how this transformation had taken place. And the rich man revealed his dream about Shimon bar Yohai. And when the sages heard this dream, they understood that a miracle had occurred, and that the rich man had been possessed by an *ibur*, the spirit of a great sage who joins his soul to the soul of another, and in this way gives it strength and guidance. So too did they know that this sage could be none other than Shimon bar Yohai, since that was the cave in which he wrote that very book of the Zohar, during the thirteen years that he was in hiding from the Romans.

After that the rich man found that all he had to do to call forth the soul of Rabbi Shimon was to open the book of the Zohar. And then he would be able to understand the mysteries of the Zohar as if they were the *aleph bet*. And in the days that followed, the sages invited him to remain in Safed, and to bring his family to join him. This he did, and before long they made him the head of the kabbalists of Safed, for they knew that he spoke with the wisdom of Shimon bar Yohai

What this tale suggests is that the spirit of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai returned in the form of an *ibur*, literally an impregnation, a positive kind of possession in which the soul of a great sage who has died binds his spirit to one of the living in order to increase a person's wisdom and faith. This is in contrast to possession by a dybbuk, where the evil spirit of one who has died takes possession of one of the living.

The presence of an *ibur* was regarded as a great blessing by Jewish mystics, especially those of Safed in the sixteenth century, while the same mystics strove greatly to exorcise dybbuks from those who were possessed by them. Here the spirit of Shimon bar Yohai comes in a dream to a man uneducated in the Torah. The spirit kisses him, and afterward the man discovers that he has become a master of the Torah, possessed with the spirit of Bar Yohai. It is characteristic of these tales that the possession by the *ibur* is not permanent, but is triggered by something, such as the study of a particular text, or the wearing of *tefillin*, the phylacteries worn by men during the morning prayers. There is a story, for example, about the *tefillin* of Rabbi Hayim ben Attar, who was known as the Or Hayim. These were purchased after his death by a wealthy man, who discovered that the spirit of the Or Hayim would emerge whenever he wore them, giving him a spiritual awareness far beyond anything he had previously experienced. In both of these tales, that of Shimon bar Yohai and that of the Or Hayim, the *ibur* represents the "inner being" that emerges to guide a person through a difficult time of transition. The fact that the presence

of the *ibur* must be triggered in some way indicates that the presence of this inner being only emerges when it is required by internal or external circumstances.

One of the most tantalizing indications of the presence of an *ibur* concerns Rav Kook. It was well known among the followers of Rav Kook that a great change had come over him when he came to the Holy Land. So great was the transformation that even his handwriting changed, as if he had become a different person. And, indeed, Rav Kook was once heard to say: "I am the soul of Reb Nachman." Rav Kook's statement is a mysterious one, which suggests a direct connection between the souls of the two great rabbis. Above all, it demonstrates how greatly Rav Kook admired Reb Nachman, and how strongly he identified with him. Among the followers of Rav Kook this statement was understood to mean that the soul of Reb Nachman had come to Rav Kook as an *ibur*, and the two souls had fused. This, then, explains the changes that came over Rav Kook when he arrived in the Holy Land, and links him to Rabbi Nachman, whose love for the Holy Land was legendary. Furthermore, Rabbi Nachman regarded his journey to the Holy Land as the completion of a quest started by his great-grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism. So here we have a quest started in one generation by the Baal Shem Tov, continued in another by Rabbi Nachman, and extended into yet another generation by Rav Kook.

The concept of the *ibur* should give us pause. A person possessed by an *ibur* has become transformed—the new soul has fused with the old. The result is a soul guided by the spirit of a sage, which brings both wisdom and strength to a wavering soul facing a virtual abyss that has to be crossed. From a psychological perspective, the man has activated the archetype of the Wise Old Man in himself. As a result of this transformation, he can now read in a language that was foreign to him. This means that he can now communicate with that part of himself whose previous messages were not received. Further, his ability to comprehend the true meaning of these messages is greatly enhanced.

The Zohar itself, the book that opened to this man because of the possession of the *ibur*, is the key text of Kabbalah. It contains many tales about Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, a great talmudic sage of the third century, who was the reputed author of the Zohar until Gershom Scholem and other scholars demonstrated that the true author was Moses de Leon, who lived in Spain in the thirteenth century. Anyone who has spent any time with the Zohar will confirm the great difficulty of its text. Further, the text is above all a symbolic one, drawing on the rich kabbalistic mythology, and in the process transforming the meaning of many concepts from the way in which they were understood in earlier sacred texts.

Following our earlier discussion about the need to learn to read the symbolic language of these tales, we see that this one embodies a solution, addressing the very issue of learning to read a foreign language by finding the solution

in a dream, a message from the unconscious to the conscious. The dream is the key vehicle in Jewish tales for messages to be delivered from the divine realm to our own. So too does the dream of the man in the cave—and the cave, of course, is a symbol of the unconscious—bring with it the power of the Wise Old Man who lies dormant until activated. Because the new soul is so closely identified with Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, the man who receives this soul has no difficulty acknowledging its inherent wisdom. Thus he is open to the wisdom ultimately emanating from his unconscious self. In a nutshell, the message of the tale and the dream can be summed up as follows: The knowledge and wisdom you seek can be found within.

Let us consider another tale, this a Hasidic one, in which a dream guides a man to a patriarchal figure, who provides salvation. This tale is “The Cave of Mattathias,” and was also collected orally in Israel, demonstrating the continued vitality of the oral tradition. It is a tale about a Hasid of the Rabbi of Riminov, as follows:

In a village near the city of Riminov there was a Hasid whose custom it was to bring newly made oil to Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Riminov, and the Rabbi would light the first candle of Hanukkah in his presence.

One year the winter was hard, the land covered with snow, and everyone was locked in their homes. But when the eve of Hanukkah arrived, the Hasid was still planning to deliver the oil. His family pleaded with him not to go, but he was determined, and in the end he set out across the deep snow.

That morning he entered the forest that separated his village from Riminov, and the moment he did it began to snow. The snow fell so fast it covered every landmark, and when at last it stopped, the Hasid found that he was lost. The whole world was covered with snow.

Now the Hasid began to regret not listening to his family. Surely the Rabbi would have forgiven his absence. Meanwhile, it had become so cold that he began to fear he might freeze. He realized that if he were to die there in the forest, he might not even be taken to a Jewish grave. That is when he remembered the oil he was carrying. In order to save his life, he would have to use it. There was no other choice.

As fast as his numb fingers could move, he tore some of the lining out of his coat and fashioned it into a wick, and he put that wick in the snow. Then he poured oil on it and prayed with great intensity. Finally, he lit the first candle of Hanukkah, and the flame seemed to light up the whole forest. And all the wolves moving through the forest saw that light and ran back to their hiding places.

After this the exhausted Hasid lay down on the snow and fell asleep. He dreamed he was walking in a warm land, and before him he saw a great mountain, and next to that mountain stood a palm tree. At the foot of the mountain was the opening of a cave. In the dream the Hasid entered the cave and found a candle burning there. He picked up that candle, and it lit the way for him until he came to a large cavern, where an old man was seated, with a very long beard. There was a sword on his thigh, and his hands were busy making wicks. All of that cavern was piled high with bales of wicks. The old man looked up when the Hasid entered and said: “Blessed be you in the Name of God.”

The Hasid returned the old man’s blessing and asked him who he was. He answered: “I am Mattathias, father of the Maccabees. During my lifetime I lit a

big torch. I hoped that all of Israel would join me, but only a few obeyed my call. Now heaven has sent me to watch for the little candles in the houses of Israel to come together to form a very big flame. And that flame will announce the Redemption and the End of Days.

"Meanwhile, I prepare the wicks for the day when everyone will contribute his candle to this great flame. And now, there is something that you must do for me—when you reach the Rabbi of Riminov, tell him that the wicks are ready, and he should do whatever he can to light the flame that we have awaited so long."

Amazed at all he had heard, the Hasid promised to give the message to the Rabbi. As he turned to leave the cave, he awoke and found himself standing in front of the Rabbi's house. Just then the Rabbi himself opened the door, and his face was glowing. He said: "The power of lighting the Hanukkah candles is very great. Whoever dedicates his soul to this deed brings the time of Redemption that much closer."

Like the tale of the kiss, this one uses a dream as a vehicle to encounter the Wise Old Man, who is identified here as Mattathias. This is clearly the case because his messianic expectations were so great, as were those of the Riminov Hasidim. Indeed, the message from Mattathias is that the messianic era is almost upon us, hinting that the Rabbi of Riminov can have an important role to play in this event. But the real importance of this dream is the way it provides salvation to the Hasid trapped in the snow. By creating the conditions to save himself, using the oil for the Hanukkah candles, he saves himself from freezing and is able to sleep, and thus to dream. The dream first transports him from a cold place to a warm one, and then brings him face to face with Mattathias. This dream meeting is a fateful one for the Hasid, for when he awakes he finds himself at the rabbi's door. A miracle has once more taken place, as it did to Rabbi Abraham when he had a vision of the *Shekhinah*, and as it did to the rich man who was kissed by Shimon bar Yohai. This miracle indicates that the abyss has been crossed and the transition completed.

From these last two tales, and from a multitude of others, we can recognize that there is a pattern to the role of the Wise Old Man. This figure is inevitably identified with one of the great Jewish patriarchs or sages, whose arrival at a time of danger heralds a miraculous event. In every case we can recognize in this pattern the presence of the archetype of the Old Man who, like the *ibur*, brings wisdom and the strength to survive a difficult transition.

Yet, for those who fail to recognize its importance, this encounter with the Wise Old Man can be disastrous. "The Cottage of Candles," a remarkable Jewish folktale from Afghanistan, presents a vivid demonstration of such an encounter:

There once was a Jew who went out into the world to seek justice. Somewhere, he was certain, true justice must exist. He looked in the streets and the markets of cities but could not find it. He traveled to villages and he explored distant fields and farms, but still justice eluded him. At last he came to an immense forest, and he entered it, for he was certain that justice must exist somewhere.

He wandered there for many years and he saw many things—the hovels of the poorest peasants, the hideaways of thieves, and the huts of witches in the darkest part of the forest. And he stopped in each of these, despite the danger, and sought clues. But no one was able to help him in his quest.

One day, just as dusk was falling, he arrived at a small clay hut that looked as if it were about to collapse. Now there was something strange about this hut, for many flickering flames could be seen through the window. The man who sought justice wondered greatly about this and knocked on the door. There was no answer. He pushed the door open and entered.

Before him was a small room crowded with many shelves. And on the shelves were a multitude of lighted candles, burning oil. Together their flames seemed to beat like wings, and the flickering light made him feel as if he were standing in the center of a quivering flame. He held up his hand, and it seemed to be surrounded with an aura, and all the candles were like a constellation of stars.

Stepping closer, he saw that some of the flames burned with a very pure fire, while others were dull, and still others were sputtering, about to go out. So too did he now notice that some of the wicks were in golden vessels, while others were in silver or marble ones, and many burned in simple vessels of clay or tin. These plain vessels had thin wicks, which burned quickly, while those made of gold or silver had wicks that lasted much longer.

While he stood there, marveling at that forest of candles, an old man in a white robe came out of one of the corners and said: “*Shalom aleikhem*, my son, what are you looking for?”

“*Aleikhem shalom*,” the man answered. “I have traveled everywhere, searching for justice, but never have I seen anything like all these candles. Why are they burning?”

The old man spoke softly: “Know that these are soul-candles, as it is written, ‘The soul of man is the candle of God’ (Prov. 20:27). Each candle is the soul of one of the living. As long as it burns, the person remains alive. But when the flame burns out, he departs from this life.”

Then the man who sought justice turned to the old man and asked: “Can I see the candle of my soul?”

The old man led him into a corner and showed him a line of tins on a low shelf. He pointed out a small, rusty one that had very little oil left. The wick was smoking and had tilted to one side. “This is your soul,” said the old man.

Then a great fear fell upon the man and he started to shiver. Could it be that the end of his life was so near and he did not know it?

Then the man noticed that next to his tin there was another, filled with oil. Its wick was straight, burning with a clear, pure light.

“And this one, whom does it belong to?” asked the man, trembling. “That is a secret,” answered the old man. “I can only reveal each man’s candle to himself alone.”

Soon after that the old man vanished from sight, and the room seemed empty except for the candles burning on every shelf.

While the man stood there, he saw a candle on another shelf sputter and go out. For a moment there was a wisp of smoke rising in the air and then it was gone. One soul had just left the world.

The man’s eyes returned to his own tin. He saw that only a few drops of oil remained, and he knew that the flame would soon burn out. At that instant he saw the candle of his neighbor, burning brightly, the tin full of oil.

Suddenly an evil thought entered his mind. He looked around and saw that the old man had disappeared. He looked closely in the corner from which he had

come, and then in the other corners, but there was no sign of him there. At that moment he reached out and took hold of the full tin and raised it above his own. But suddenly a strong hand gripped his arm, and the old man stood beside him.

"Is this the kind of justice you are seeking?" he asked. His grip was like iron, and the pain caused the man to close his eyes.

And when the fingers released him, he opened his eyes and saw that everything had disappeared: the old man, the cottage, the shelves, and all the candles. And the man stood alone in the forest and heard the trees whispering his fate.

This tale is an example of a divine test, such as that of the Garden of Eden, or that of the binding of Isaac, or that of Job. The man seeking justice arrives at the cottage, where the old man permits him to view the candle of his soul. The identity of the old man remains a mystery, although his supernatural aspect is quite clear. As the Keeper of the Soul-Candles he functions as an Elijah-type figure who is hidden in the forest in the model of the *Lamed-Vav Tzaddikim*, the Thirty-Six Hidden Saints who are said to be the pillars of the world. Above all, he is the incarnation of the archetype of the Wise Old Man.

This test that takes place in the cottage surely does so at the behest of God, so it remains a divine one. One way of reading the tale is to see that in arriving at this cottage, the man is on the verge of completing his quest to find justice, but he is first tested to see if he himself is just. Instead of proving worthy, he attempts to destroy another's life to lengthen his own. But he is caught and made to face the consequences of his action. In this sense he does find justice at last, for justice is exactly meted out. It is interesting to note that the man's quest is in many ways parallel to that of the man from the country in Kafka's famous parable "Before the Law," found in his novel *The Trial*, who comes seeking justice at the gates of the Law. And in both tales the man fails to find the justice he was seeking.

One way of reading this tale is to see the man who is seeking justice as one who is at the very end of a long quest. This is clearly indicated by the fact that his soul-candle is about to burn out. If he were able to pass the test in the cottage of candles, he would have received his just reward. But he fails the test at the very end, demonstrating that he was not a true seeker after justice, since he did not abide by that justice for himself. Thus he falls prey to the powers of the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination, which must be overcome in order to achieve justice, which, in terms of this story, can be seen to represent a kind of inner harmony and acceptance of one's fate.

Thus we have seen how archetypal figures such as the Anima or the Wise Old Man appear in Jewish lore, transformed into mythic figures such as the *Shekhinah* or a patriarch. Indeed, all of the tales discussed here draw on the collective Jewish myth. Just as individuals go through a series of transitions in their lives, so have the Jewish people gone through a series of collective experiences, not only those recounted in the Scriptures, but the collective experience of the people in every generation. Therefore these tales can be understood both in terms of their collective Jewish meaning, and their meaning in terms of



an individual's psychic experience. So too is there a deeper collective level where these tales can be recognized in purely archetypal terms. These three levels of meaning exist simultaneously for all of these tales, and provide them with a depth of profound meaning.

What we find, then, in these rabbinic tales is the projection of an unbridled imagination, set in a mythical world reflecting the conditions of their inner life, drawing on a complex system of symbols which have a remarkable parallel to the Jungian constellation. That the symbols used by the rabbis have an archetypal character is confirmed by the tales of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. The traditional Bratslaver commentary on these tales clearly demonstrates they were understood to have a direct correlation to key mystical figures such as the *Shekhinah* and the Messiah and to many other mystical concepts. A study of the way this mystical system was understood and the purposes it was intended to serve, demonstrates that it was a method of spiritual purification, which drew on many mystical techniques, including prayer, fasting, and ritual immersion, and, as discussed, allegorical readings of sacred texts. So too are dreams recognized as divine messages and an attempt is made to interpret them.

Certain key Jewish myths, such as that of the *Shekhinah* or that of the Messiah, have a direct correlation to recognizable archetypal patterns and figures, and when considered from this perspective they readily open themselves to interpretation. The Jewish tales that draw on these myths can be interpreted to mirror a complex psychic process involving the interaction of a constellation of archetypes. Such an analysis reveals the central role of psychological processes, especially those concerned with patterns of change, in Jewish mystical teachings and tales.

In conclusion, it can be said that there is a recurrent pattern in Jewish tales of a person in mid-life reaching a crisis which is resolved by the intervention of some "celestial" or "saintly" being. In Jungian terms these beings (*Anima/Shekhinah*, Wise Old Man/Elijah) are "inner beings," introjections of the person's own soul/self who emerge to help the person through the crisis and make a transition to a higher state of personal psychic development, that of Individuation.

# *The Leadership Qualities of Moses*

**ARI Z. ZIVOTOFISKY**

*This article is dedicated in memory of my grandfather, Menashe "Muni" Zivotofsky, who passed away on 24 Av 5754 (August 1, 1994). He was a person who lived his life with the understanding "that ordinary caring is truly great" and was always willing to go the extra step for anyone who needed assistance. He was a man who truly personified the Jewish value of hesed.*

MOSES, THE QUINTESSENTIAL PROPHET AND teacher, the lawgiver and the redeemer, was also the archetypal Jewish leader; the Torah and Midrash are replete with accounts of his leadership. But what unique characteristics did he possess that qualified him to be selected as a leader in the first place? Why did God choose him? Of course, the same question can be, and is, asked about God's other biblical choices of individuals. Why, for instance, was Abraham chosen to be the first Jew? With regard to Abraham there are no biblical preselection stories. Where the Bible is silent, the Midrash fills in the details, supplying multitudes of stories of Abraham's devotion to God long before God actually revealed Himself. With regard to Moses, however, the Bible *itself* does provide preselection stories. However, the data are sparse, because for the entire eighty years prior to his selection,<sup>1</sup> there are only four biblical stories<sup>2</sup> from which to approach the question of why he was chosen. The classic rabbinic midrashim embellish these stories, though sparingly with respect to Moses' role in them, and add, again sparingly, new stories not found in the Bible.

The preselection tales of Moses lead one to ask: What particular character traits emerge from the biblical narrative that account for his selection as leader? Which qualities did the rabbis add, emphasize, or de-emphasize by including particular details and stories? Are there lessons to be learned from them? The answers to these questions might shed some light on what the Bible and the rabbis viewed as important qualities for *the* Jewish leader and, hence, for subsequent Jewish leaders.

The four biblical stories about the preselection of Moses are:

(1) And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown up, that he went out (*va-yatze*) to his brethren and looked (*va-ya'ar*) on their burdens and he saw (*va-yar*) an Egyptian hitting (*makeh*) a Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man (*'ish*) he

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ARI Z. ZIVOTOFISKY, an ordained rabbi, is a doctoral candidate in biomedical engineering at Case Western Reserve University. The author wishes to thank Professor Avigdor Shinan, for whom an early version of this paper was originally written and who provided invaluable comments to further develop it.

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hit (*va-yakeh*) the Egyptian and hid him in the sand (Exod. 2:11-12).

(2) And he went out (*va-yatze*) on the second day and behold, two men of the Hebrews were striving together and he said to him that did the wrong: "Why do you smite your fellow?" And he said: "Who made you a man (*'ish*), a ruler and a judge over us? Do you say [intend] to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?" And Moses feared and said: "Surely the thing is known" (Exod. 2:13-14).

(3) . . . but Moses fled . . . and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by the well. Now the priest of Midian [Jethro] had seven daughters; and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to their father's flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up (*va-yakam*) and saved them and watered their flock. . . . And they said: "An Egyptian man (*'ish*) delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds . . . and watered the flock" (Exod. 2:15-19).

(4) Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law . . . and he led the flock to the . . . wilderness . . . and the angel of the Lord appeared to him . . . and he looked and behold the bush burned with fire and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said: "I will turn aside now and see this great sight." . . . And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush (Exod. 3:1-4).<sup>3</sup>

As each of these stories is examined in light of the rabbinic literature it will be seen that a common theme emerges. Moses is consistently portrayed as not only caring and concerned for others, but also as willing and ready to act upon those feelings. He was the true Empath.<sup>4</sup>

A cursory reading of the first adventure might lead one to see Moses as a violent vigilante. He sees an Egyptian hitting a fellow Jew, looks to make sure there are no witnesses, and then proceeds to kill the Egyptian. However, the rabbis saw this story in a very different light, and deemed Moses' action as both appropriate and positive. Noting the repetition of the word *va-yar*, "he saw," in Exodus 2:11, the Midrash (Exodus Rabbah 1:32) comments (on the first *va-yar*): "What is *va-yar*? He saw their burdens, wept, and lamented, saying: 'I am deeply distressed on your account, would that I could die for you. For there is no work harder than working with mortar.'" But in the eyes of the Midrash, Moses did not just lament. The Midrash continues: "He would energetically help every one of them." Thus, just as with the second "look," Moses saw an injustice against a fellow Jew, felt pained, *and* took action (i.e., slaying the Egyptian), so too, the rabbis argue, was the case with the first "look."

Similar and even more detailed stories as to the nature of Moses' action(s) in response to the first "look" are found in a later Midrash:<sup>5</sup> "Rabbi Nehemiah said: 'Moses saw blood oozing from their shoulders through their burdens and he would bandage the wounds' . . . Rabbi Eliezer said: 'When they handled the plaster, the wind would scatter it about and it would get into their eyes. Moses would go and soothe them with ointment' . . . He saw how they died and were cast on dung heaps and left unburied, and Moses . . . would personally attend to their burial.'"

Commenting on the same word, *va-yar*, in Genesis 22:13, the *Aggadat Esther* 3:5 states: “Rabbi Elazar said: ‘[As for] the wicked, the looking of their eyes is a stumbling block [for it exposes them to sources of temptation], but for the righteous it [the looking of their eyes] is an opportunity to be even greater.’” Similarly, in *Esther Rabbah* 7:9, Rabbi Chelbo, commenting on Psalms 69:24, “Let their eyes be darkened that they not see,” gives examples of how the “seeing” of the wicked<sup>6</sup> leads them to hell while the “seeing” (*va-yar*) of the righteous<sup>7</sup> raises them to the Garden of Eden. He finds a parallel for this in Psalms 107:41, “The upright see and are glad.” In all of these examples of righteous, upright individuals, they did not just see, but their seeing led them to positive actions. The positive actions include: Abraham inviting the three [angelic] guests into his tent; Abraham sacrificing the ram in place of his son Isaac; Jacob rolling away the well stone and watering the sheep tended by Rachel; Pinhas avenging God’s name; and Moses turning to see the burning bush. The *Midrash Ha-Gadol* similarly extends this list to include others who saw and reacted with a meritorious deed. These Midrashim present a whole ensemble of Jewish leaders who possessed this quality of taking positive action based on “seeing” the need of other beings.

The Midrash, by ascribing an action to the first *va-yar*, inserts numerous examples of Moses assisting his fellow Jews even before the first explicit biblical example, that of killing the Egyptian. But help achieved through beneficial benevolence is very different from that achieved through seemingly impulsive violent action.<sup>8</sup> How can such violence, and the fact that Moses is never censured for it anywhere in biblical or classic rabbinic literature, be justified?<sup>9</sup> The tenth-century Gaonic leader, Rav Sa’adyah, explains that Moses had not intended to kill the Egyptian, but simply to hit him and save the persecuted Jew. The midrashic commentators, however, adopt a different interpretive strategy, suggesting that the Egyptian was guilty of either killing the Jew,<sup>10</sup> intending to kill him,<sup>11</sup> or adultery.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the *Tanhuma* (Exodus 9) says that the Egyptian was the father of the blasphemer (discussed in Leviticus 24:10ff). Thus, this Egyptian was connected in some way to the three cardinal sins of idolatry,<sup>13</sup> adultery, and murder, and the Midrash is suggesting that Moses’ act of killing him was a legitimate act of zealotry (*kana’ut*).<sup>14</sup>

If, as the Midrash contends, Moses’ killing of the Egyptian was a legitimate act, why then did he, in a seemingly craven manner, look this way and that way to make sure that there was no man (*’ish*) around?<sup>15</sup> If *’ish* is to be understood not only literally, as “person,” but also as a *man*, a real man willing to take action, it becomes more understandable. The Talmud<sup>16</sup> says: “Rabbi Yehudah interprets [the meaning of “man,” *’ish*, in this verse]: he saw that there was no *man* to show zeal [*kana’ut*] on behalf of the Almighty.” *Leviticus Rabbah* (32:4) adds: “He saw that there was no *man* to save the Jews.” According to these interpretations, there were certainly other people present, and Moses was not afraid of witnesses; the issue at hand was that there was no *man* to stand up and take action.

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This interpretation is supported by a verse in which there is no doubt about the meaning of *'ish*. "And the Lord saw it and it displeased Him for there was no judgment, and He saw that there was no *'ish* [clearly meaning *man* in this context] and wondered that there was no intercessor. Therefore, His arm brought salvation to Him and His righteousness, it sustained Him" (Isa. 59:15-16). Perhaps the prophet even had this story of Moses in mind, and compared God's judgment and action with the behavior of Moses. God also "looked around" to see whether there was someone to intercede, a true *man* who would prevent such an evil deed, and He, too, came up empty-handed. Perhaps this is what Hillel refers to in *Pirkei Avot* (2:5), when he says: "In a place where there is no *man* (*'ish*), strive to be a *man* (*'ish*)."<sup>17</sup>

The Midrashim on this first story thus tell us that Moses was a man of action. He saw a wrong being perpetrated, was moved by this lack of justice, and saw that there was no one to take action. He therefore did what had to be done to restore justice. Did he better the lot of the Jewish people with this deed? Perhaps not. Maybe he did not even help that one Jew, who might have already been dead, but he could not stand idly by and watch an injustice. He was an *'ish*, a *man* of action, an Empath.

In the second story, Moses happens upon two Jews quarreling. Though his previous excursion among his brethren had led him to a bloody confrontation, he did not seek refuge in the Pharaoh's palace, as he so easily could have, but, instead, he again went out among his fellow Jews. The Midrash (Exodus Rabbah 1:32) points out that this incident (verse 13) starts with the same word that began the previous incident (verse 11): *va-yatze*, Moses "went out"—which is to say, Moses went out with the same attitude as before, undeterred and willing to stand up for justice.

Unlike the earlier confrontation, where Moses never attempts to communicate with the Egyptian, here Moses attempts to intercede verbally. The response from the reprimanded individual<sup>18</sup> is very revealing. He says, "Who appointed you a man (*'ish*), a ruler and a judge over us?" The Midrash,<sup>19</sup> in an attempt to understand the use of the word *'ish* in this context,<sup>20</sup> postulates that perhaps Moses was not yet of adult age, and his status to judge and act was, therefore, being challenged.<sup>21</sup>

An alternate approach to understand the word *'ish* in this context is possible. The Bible here employs the same word which was used in the previous incident, *'ish*, to connote a *man* of action. Although the speaker here intends to question Moses' authority, Moses' chief leadership attribute, namely his readiness to act against injustice and, therefore, his right to this authority, emerges even in the words of his antagonist. It is as if to say: "Who taught you this concept of being a *man* and standing up for what is right? We do not have such people here." It was in response to this that Moses said, "Surely the thing is known" (Exod. 2:14). The simple understanding of this statement is that Moses is referring to public knowledge of his slaying of the Egyptian. However, ac-

cording to the Midrashim on the first incident, Moses had not been concerned about witnesses and, therefore, already knew that his deed of killing the Egyptian was known. Rather, he had been looking for a *man* to take action. When, in this second story, he said, “Surely the thing is known,” he had something else in mind. The *Tanhuma Yashan* (Va-’era 17) quotes Rav Yehudah Halevi the son of Rav Shalom: “Moses said to God: ‘Master of the Universe, why is this nation enslaved? Seventy nations exist in the world and only this one is enslaved.’ Now I know their sin.” Thus, that which is now “known” is not something *about Moses* that is now *known to others*, but, rather, something *known to Moses about others*—the reason for the Jews’ enslavement, their grievous sin that is causing them to remain enslaved. What is this sin? This Midrash does not tell us.<sup>22</sup> I suggest that it could be the sin of total apathy displayed by the people. Not only was there no *’ish* among them, but they were so deeply apathetic that they did not even know how to appreciate or deal with an Empath or *man* when presented with one, considering him more as an enemy than an ally. As a consequence, Moses was forced to flee to Midian, to save himself both from Pharaoh and from the apathy of his fellow Jews.

Upon arriving in Midian, Moses again finds himself in the position of standing up for justice. While sitting by the well, he sees Jethro’s seven daughters being harassed by the other shepherds, and he saves them in a non-violent, peaceful manner. The Bible uses the word *va-yakam*—and Moses “rose up,” as if to say that Moses (again) rose to the occasion. Despite the fact that he was fleeing from Egypt because of his previously being a *man*, he again “rises,” *va-yakam*, and helps the helpless.<sup>23</sup>

What were the other shepherds doing to the seven shepherdesses? The Midrashim suggest several possibilities. One opinion states that they wanted to throw them into the water<sup>24</sup> (and, presumably, kill them). Another possibility raised is that “the shepherds attempted to violate them.”<sup>25</sup> A third suggestion<sup>26</sup> is that Jethro’s daughters were being harassed as part of his excommunication. The Midrash (Exodus Rabbah 1:38) relates a story: “Jethro was a priest to idolatry, but when he realized its worthlessness he rejected it . . . . He summoned his fellow citizens and told them . . . He then removed all the appurtenances of idolatry from his house . . . [and] thereupon they placed a ban [of excommunication] upon him.” Thus, similar to the story of Moses killing the Egyptian, the Midrash embellishes this story at the well so that it also includes elements of idolatry, adultery, and murder.

When Jethro asks his seven daughters to describe their savior, they respond that an *’ish mitzri*, an Egyptian man, had saved them.<sup>27</sup> The Midrash is bothered by this description of Moses, particularly by the word *’ish*.<sup>28</sup> Why not simply say “an Egyptian saved us”—why the extra word *’ish*? Because of this seemingly extra word, the Midrash<sup>29</sup> makes certain comparisons between Moses and Noah, who was also called an *’ish* (Gen. 6:9). Alternatively, it is possible to suggest that the Bible is again stressing that Moses was an *’ish*, a *man*, some-



one willing to rise to the occasion when no one else was willing to assume the role.

Within these three stories, there seem to be a number of progressions which reflect Moses' development. One progression is in terms of the archetype of the oppressed that is represented. First there was an Egyptian beating a Jew, then two Jews fighting,<sup>30</sup> and lastly, Moses intervenes between two groups of non-Jews. In each succeeding story there was seemingly less reason for him to get involved and yet, in all of these three archetypal cases, he intervened and attempted to save the victim(s) from the aggressor(s).

Yet another progression that can be noted relates to Moses' reaction to the injustice. First he reacts, apparently with force, by killing the Egyptian. In the second incident he speaks to the perpetrator, albeit with forceful language. Finally, in the Midian story, the Midrash (Exodus Rabbah 1:39) comments: "Scripture continues: 'and watered the flock' (Exod. 2:19); it does not say 'our [Jethro's] flock' but 'the flock,' for he watered the flocks of the other shepherds too."<sup>31</sup> Thus, in the third incident, Moses acted in a manner that could bring about a harmonious peace between the parties involved. His mode of intervention had developed from rash violence, through verbal intercession, finally culminating, according to the Midrash, in peace-making. Thus, regardless of the archetype of the nationalities or relationships of the persons involved or of the nature of the response, there is one common theme: Moses is a *man* in places where there are no *men*.<sup>32</sup>

These three stories together represent the course of Moses' development toward becoming a leader. In each he displays the traits of empathy and of standing up to an injustice as a *man*, yet after these three incidents he still is not selected to lead the Jewish people, and God has not yet spoken to him. There is still one more episode that must occur in which Moses will exhibit his crowning trait. Following his development in the first three stories, he is ready for the final biblical preselection story—the incident with the burning bush. Upon *seeing* the wondrous sight of the "bush burning and [the bush] not being consumed" (Exod. 3:2), Moses decides to turn and get a better look. The Bible tells us: "And the angel of the Lord appeared to him. . . . And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, *God called to him*" (Exod. 3:2-4). These verses seem to be giving the reason why God spoke to him: "for God saw that he turned aside to see." Interestingly, the verse does not say "to see the bush" or "to see the spectacle," but simply that Moses turned "to see."<sup>33</sup> The Midrash picks up on this point, and, in what appears to be a flashback to earlier events, provides this illuminating passage:

Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rav Jose the Galilean said: [Regarding Moses while still in Egypt] He [Moses] saw a child under the load of an adult, and an adult bearing the load of a child; a woman bearing a man's load, and a man bearing the load of a woman; a young man with the load of an old man, and an old man with a young man's load.<sup>34</sup> . . . he would rearrange their burdens. . . . Said the

Holy One, blessed be He, “You put aside your own affairs and went to share in Israel’s suffering . . . Therefore I will leave . . . and speak only to you.” That is the meaning of “the Lord saw that he turned aside to see” (Exod. 3:4): He saw that he had turned aside from his own affairs to see their burdens; therefore, “He called to him out of the midst of the bush” (Exod. 3:4) (Exodus Rabbah 1:32).

The Midrash, using a play on words,<sup>35</sup> is telling us one of the reasons behind Moses’ selection: He was willing to put aside his own needs and help another person. God therefore selected him as a prophet to be spoken to directly.

Another interpretation of “he turned to see,” also a play on words, provides another reason why Moses was selected:

Rabbi Isaac said: What does *sar* (turned aside) imply? The Holy One, blessed is He, declared: “This man is grieved (*tzar*) and distressed by Israel’s suffering in Egypt; therefore he is fit to be their shepherd.” There and then “God called to him out of the midst of the bush” (Exod. 3:4) (Exodus Rabbah 1:32).

Clearly, his status as an *’ish*, which was discussed above and portrayed in the Midrashim, was instrumental in his selection, but that seems not to have been enough. These Midrashim seem to be providing explicit reasons why Moses was selected,<sup>36</sup> all centered around the burning bush. The problem is that these incidents are unrelated to the burning bush; they are simply flashbacks to other examples of Moses acting as an *’ish*, clearly a quality that was necessary but seemingly not sufficient. The placing of these flashbacks in this context suggests that Moses’ response to the burning bush revealed a final, additional quality for national leadership. The verse states, “And the angel of the Lord appeared to *him*.” The Midrash (Exodus Rabbah 2:8) comments:

To *him*—What does the verse indicate with the word to him? It comes to teach that there were other people with him *but none saw except for Moses* (emphasis added).

This, then, is Moses’ prize quality—he saw what others did not see<sup>37</sup> and, based on what he saw, he then felt pain for others, and, most importantly, he was willing to “turn aside” and act for others. He was an Empath, an *’ish*. He was not apathetic to the pain of others, nor to the injustices that they suffered, and he was willing to act. Moreover, it is possible to teach people to be kind and generous, but if they do not see the need they cannot act upon it. Moses had the God-given quality of being attuned to his surroundings, able to perceive the need, and then to act upon it.

The Midrashim cited above, based on biblical verses, explicitly explain why Moses was selected to be a prophet and the leader of the Jewish nation, and this reason stands wholly independent of all of the rabbinic embellishments of the biblical stories. Thus, the question to be addressed is: Why the need for the midrashic embellishments and additions to the biblical stories?

It is possible that the rabbis wanted to convey a particular message to the

average Jew. They recognized that the absolute empathy displayed by Moses included a violent action and, fearing that this would serve as a precedent for others, saw a need to limit and to channel the empathy in specific directions. They therefore embellished the stories of the Egyptian and of the daughters of Jethro with so many sins and supernatural actions so as to make them difficult to use as precedent. In the midrashic scheme, it is unlikely that an ordinary person would find himself in a situation identical to Moses', one so replete with sin as to demand violence. These embellishments are thus intended to prevent people from being overly zealous and recklessly murdering others, or getting involved in quarrels where they do not belong, and using Moses as the role model.

In addition to limiting this empathy, the rabbis had another goal. By adding the very simple, mundane types of aid that Moses provided, like dressing a wound, applying soothing ointment to ailing eyes, burying the dead—deeds which are within everyone's capabilities—they were attempting to channel this empathy by using Moses as a role model. These deeds simply require motivation to take action. There is no need for unique talents, great miracles, or a special position in life. The rabbis were trying to impress upon the reader, the Jewish masses, that ordinary caring is truly great. This is what leaders are made of; this, and not supernatural acts, is what led to the selection of Moses and what made Moses great as a *man*.

The above biblical and rabbinic stories, along with the explicit statements of the Midrash, seem to establish satisfactorily what qualities Moses possessed that led God to choose him as the leader. Yet, the Midrash and the Zohar add one more story, and give an additional reason for Moses' selection.

"The Lord tests the righteous" (Ps. 11:4-5). . . . How does He test them? Through the way they tend sheep. He tested David in this way and found him a good shepherd. . . . Said the Holy One, blessed is He: Let him who knows how to tend sheep come and tend My people. Thus it is written, "From following the ewes that give suck He brought him, to be shepherd over Jacob, His people" (Ps. 78:71). He tested Moses in the very same way. Our Masters related:<sup>38</sup> Once when our Teacher Moses—peace to him!—was tending Jethro's flocks in the wilderness, a kid ran away, and he pursued it until it reached a shady spot, where a water hole came in view and the kid stopped to drink. When Moses came up to it, he said, "I did not know that you ran away because of thirst; you must be exhausted." So he put it on his shoulder and walked back. Said the Holy One, blessed is He, to him, "You are indeed compassionate to care for the flock belonging to a mortal with such tenderness; therefore you will tend My flock." When ewes lamb, the shepherd gathers the new-born lambs in his bosom, lest they weary or overture, and tenderly carries them after their mother. So must a Jewish leader lead his people tenderly, with compassion, not with cruelty . . . protect them from their Gentile foes and from earthly and heavenly judgment and lead them to the Life Everlasting. So was Moses indeed a faithful shepherd, and the Holy One, blessed is He, saw that he was fit to tend Israel, exactly in the same way that he tended the flock, caring for the rams and the ewes in accordance with their respective needs (Exodus Rabbah 2:2); (Zohar on Exodus 2:21a).

Why the need for this additional non-biblical story and reason? Did Moses need further testing? Had he not already proven himself worthy and caring? The answer may be based on Exodus Rabbah 2:3. The Midrash there, commenting on Proverbs (30:5), says:

God does not give greatness to a person until he tests him with a small thing and then he elevates him to greatness. . . . David was tested with sheep . . . and so too Moses was tested with sheep,<sup>39</sup> as it says: "He led the sheep to the desert" (Exod. 3:1) . . . and God took him as the shepherd of Israel, as it says: "You did lead your people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Ps. 77:21).

It is almost as if the Midrash were saying that God uses animals to test His leaders' leadership qualities. If the individual passes, God then elevates him to leading His people.

The leadership of Moses was to be unique in that it consisted of two parts. Moses, therefore, required two types of tests.<sup>40</sup> The first part was to do justice with Pharaoh and with other wicked people, as God tells Moses: "For I have made you as a God to Pharaoh"—to do justice with him, as God had told Abraham: "And also the nation that subjugates them will I judge" (Gen. 15:14). Secondly, his leadership would include taking the Jews out of Egypt and leading the people—as God continues with Abraham: "Then they will leave with a great wealth." Thus, Moses needed to be tested in both of these areas.<sup>41</sup> He first needed to be tested on his willingness to confront *wrongdoers* for the sake of justice and peace—the three biblical stories and the first rabbinic ones mentioned served this purpose. Second, he was tested with animals, similar to how King David was later tested, to ascertain his leadership qualities *for his own people as a positive leader*,<sup>42</sup> and not only against adversity.

These two basic qualities of leadership are what is being stressed in the preselection Moses stories. The biblical stories and the rabbinic embellishments of them characterize Moses as an individual who is incapable of standing idly by while an injustice is being perpetrated by one person or group on another person or group. Whatever consequences he may face, he nonetheless feels obligated to act to undo and correct the injustice. He is a *man* in a place where there are no *men*. And he always recognizes such situations. Others may say that they would help if they had recognized the need; Moses was uniquely sensitive to recognize the need. This is the aspect the Bible itself wants to stress in the four biblical stories. The rabbis added one additional test. They were pointing out that that first attribute alone, no matter how significant, even if it looks like it was sufficient from the biblical narrative, does not truly suffice. Moses needed to prove his leadership abilities in a situation in which there was no oppressor, no enemy, other than nature, to overcome. He had to demonstrate that he could lead as a positive leader, not only as a leader who overcomes adversaries and enemies.<sup>43</sup> This is the quality that is tested by his being a shepherd. Passing both these tests, he became the chosen leader of the Israelites,

leading them to freedom, to receive the Torah on Mount Sinai, and, after forty years of travail in the desert, to the edge of the Promised Land. It is these two qualities together, that of being an *'ish*, by both knowing when and how to fight injustice, and that of being a positive leader, that define the archetypal Jewish leader.

## NOTES

1. Or, perhaps, the revelation of his selection—God did not make Himself known to Moses until he had proven himself in action. There are many rabbinic sources which deal with the foreknowledge of Moses' selection (see for example B. Sotah 11b and *Targum Yonatan* on Exodus 2:1-5). This foreknowledge does not preclude this discussion, for if Moses had not actually proven himself worthy, he still could have been rejected. This is similar to the tension that generally exists between God's foreknowledge and man's free will.

The eight years is based on Exodus 7:7. See Genesis Rabbah 100:22, where it states that Moses served the Jewish people for forty years, from the age of eighty to one hundred and twenty.

2. These four stories are those in which Moses takes an active role, in contrast to the many stories found in the Bible and Midrash regarding his birth and experiences in Pharaoh's palace.

3. Interestingly, the first three stories are almost never referred to again, either in subsequent biblical books or in the vast rabbinic literature describing Moses. The first one is mentioned in the *Tisha be-'Av kinah* (lament) of *'Ay Koh* (where is [the merit of the word]), by R. Eliezer Ha-Kalir, in a positive light (Artscroll, *Kinot*, p. 192). Moses as a shepherd of sheep and of the Jews is frequently mentioned, including in another *kinah* by Ha-Kalir, *'Az ba-Halokh* ("Then when [Jeremiah] went") (Artscroll, *Kinot*, p. 280). The traits of Moses depicted in these first three stories are also never again summoned (at least as far as biblical and rabbinic narratives are concerned). He is never again called upon to use deadly force. Even in the various wars which take place under his leadership, he never uses force but rather remains standing, as leader, and not avenger, on the mountaintop.

4. On Moses as an Empath see: S'forno on Exodus 2:10 where he discusses that the name Moses indicates or foreshadows that Moses will be a future helper of others; Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, *Oznayim la-Torah* (Israel, 1980, Hebrew) on Exodus 2:21, where he explains the unusual situation of the leader of the Jews spending the greater part of his first eighty years away from the Jews as due to his overriding quality of empathy. Had he been permitted to stay among the Jews he would have been unable to control his desire to do good and rectify wrongs, and it is clear what kind of trouble that caused him in his preselection period. Subsequent to the preparation of this article, I learned of a paper by Dr. William M. Frank with Rabbi Irving Greenberg, "Moses: An Interpretation," which discusses some of the ideas regarding Moses as an Empath. See Ruth Frank, ed., *William M. Frank: A Torah and Renaissance Man, "Live, Laugh and Learn"* (Jerusalem, B.A.L. Mass Communications, 1982), particularly p. 82.

5. Manuscript of *Yalkut Kurdistan*, quoted by Rabbi Menahem Mendel Kasher, *Torah Shlemah*. (New York, 1940, Hebrew).

6. As in Genesis 6:2, 9:22, and 28:8; Numbers 22:2 and 24:1; and Esther 3:5.

7. As in Genesis 18:2, 22:13, and 29:2; Exodus 3:2; and Numbers 25:7.

8. It is almost as if Moses is carrying on the legacy of his ancestor, Levi, as described in Jacob's blessing: "for in their anger they slew a man" (Gen. 49:6).

9. In *Midrash Petirat Moshe*, however, he is reprimanded for killing the Egyptian, and we are told it was a sin. It is also possible that Moses' living in Midian for so many years was his equivalent of the *galut* (exile) required of an accidental murderer (Num. 25:6). This idea is found in Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:29.

10. *Pirke de-Rebbi Eliezer*, Chapter 48.

11. The same verb, *lehakot*, is used in describing both Moses' and the Egyptian's actions.

12. Exodus Rabbah 1:32.

13. As the father of the blasphemer.

14. The *Tanhuma*, taken alone and not in conjunction with other sources (notes 10 and 12), is problematic in that it would seem difficult to define as a legitimate act of zealotry the killing of the father

of a blasphemer (i.e., idolater), even if Moses saw this filial relationship in a prophetic vision. On Moses acting as zealot at other times, see *Tanna de-ve-Eliyahu* (4:1), where the order to kill those who worshipped the golden calf (Exod. 32:27) is attributed directly to Moses, who then ascribed it to God. (For a discussion of this Midrash, see A. Zivotofsky, "Perspectives on Truthfulness in the Jewish Tradition," JUDAISM 42:3, Summer 1993, in particular, p. 283.) See also Numbers 24:5, where it again appears that Moses is ordering more killing than prescribed by God.

15. For Moses surely would not have been afraid of the Egyptians, as he knew that God would protect him for a legitimate action on behalf of the Jews. The Midrash bears this assumption out with its array of stories of how Moses survived Pharaoh's sword.

16. B. Sotah 11b. A parallel passage is found in Exodus Rabbah 1:33.

17. Compare also Isaiah 41:28, "For I behold, and there is no man among them and there is no counselor, that when I ask of them could answer a word," where "man" clearly means a *man* able and willing to respond. See also Exodus 2:2, 2:21; I Samuel 4:9; I Kings 2:2; Isaiah 63:5 and Jeremiah 5:1. In Proverbs 20:6 both words '*adam*' and '*ish*' are used to refer to man, with '*ish*' clearly referring to a *man*. See also piyut '*Omnam 'Ashamanu*' (by Yose ben Yose, sixth century), recited in the Yom Kippur evening service (p. 108 in the Artscroll *Mahzor*), which says, *Tareh ki 'ein 'ish, 'asay 'imanu tzedakah* (see that we have no champion [lit. man], act charitably with us), where '*ish*' clearly means *man*. (The note in the Artscroll *Mahzor* actually says that it refers specifically to Moses, although I could find no earlier source for this).

For more on this concept, see Benno Jacob, "The Childhood and Youth of Moses, the Messenger of God," in *Essays in Honour of the Very Rev. Dr. J.H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday, Sept. 25, 1942*, edited by I. Epstein, E. Levine and C. Roth (E. Goldstone, 1944). See also Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II, 45.

18. The Midrash (Exodus Rabbah 1:34) identifies this individual as either Datan or Aviram, part of the group that rebelled against Moses' leadership in the desert.

19. Exodus Rabbah 1:35 as well as *Yalkut Shimoni* (1:167), quoting the *Midrash 'Avkir*.

20. In Genesis 39:11, where the word '*ish*' seems strange, and in Genesis 6:9, where it appears redundant, the Midrash attempts to explain it (Genesis Rabbah 36:2).

21. It is interesting that the second century B.C.E. Hellenistic Jewish playwright, Yehezkel, in his portrayal of this scene, has the response as "Who sent you here to be a judge and a ruler," leaving out any reference to the biblically-used word of '*ish*'. See "Yeziat Mizrayim, A Tragedy in Five Acts," Y. Gutman, tr., *Hasifrut ha-Yahadut ha-Helenisti* (Mosad Bialik, 1963).

22. Other midrashim do list particular sins, for example slandering or informing.

23. From here, the Midrash (*Mekhilta Shirah* 1) derives just how passionately Moses strove for justice. He had run away because of attempting to administer justice, and he ran right into the need for it again. The Midrash explains that it is because of Moses' zeal for justice that justice is described as his in "Judges and officers you shall make for yourself" (Deut. 16:18). Like justice, the *Mekhilta* continues, the Jewish people are called Moses' people (Exod. 32:7) because he was willing to give his life for them. The *Midrash ha-Gadol* (Exod. 32:32) actually says: "Any *parnas* (Jewish leader), who would not readily destroy his life and fling it down for the Jewish people, is no *parnas*."

24. *Tanhuma Yashan*, Exodus 11.

25. Exodus Rabbah 1:38.

26. *Tanhuma Yashan*, Exodus 11.

27. In his response Jethro too use the term '*ish*' and asks them why they did not bring him home (Exod. 2:20).

28. The Midrash also spends considerable time on the idea of describing Moses as an Egyptian, but whereas that is, perhaps, a troubling description, '*ish*' appears altogether superfluous.

29. Genesis Rabbah 36:2.

30. Lest it be said that the difference between the first two is insignificant (for does it really matter who the oppressor is when the oppressed is a fellow Jew?), *Pirke de-Rebbi Eliezer* (chapter 48) comments on the apparent redundancy in Exodus 2:11—"smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren"—saying that the one being beaten was "of the family of Kahat, who was his kinsman, of the tribe of Levi." Accordingly, the progression is even more apparent: A close relative, then another, more distantly-related Jew, and finally, non-Jewish individuals.

31. Similarly, in Leviticus Rabbah (34:8): "Our sages interpreted: He drew water for us for the sake of our father and for the shepherds for the sake of peace." Philo in *Haye Moshe* describes a lengthy dialogue that Moses had with the shepherds that finally persuaded them to do *teshuvah*, penitence.

32. On Moses being an '*ish*', see also: Exodus 11:3 ("The '*ish*' Moses . . ."), where '*ish*' appears



superfluous; Numbers 12:3 ("The 'ish Moses was very humble, more so than all men [ 'adam, not 'ish]"), where 'ish appears superfluous and incongruous; *Tanna de-ve-Eliyahu Zuta* 16:12 on Numbers 27:18; B. Sotah 14a, commenting on Deuteronomy 34:6, and *Mekhilta* on Exodus 18:7 (see also *Torah Temimah* there), which both state that 'ish can refer specifically to Moses. On 'ish as referring specifically to God see: B. Sotah 42b, Sotah 48a (second to last line), Sanhedrin 93a, and Sanhedrin 96b (based on Exodus 15:3). On 'ish in general, see: Sukkah 52b; Yoma 75b, last line; commentaries on Ruth 1:1; Numbers 27:18 (see also *Torah Temimah*)—when Moses asked God for a successor, he asked for an 'ish. (On that verse, Rav Mendel of Kotzk makes a beautiful comment. He says that a leader of the Jews must be, first and foremost, an 'ish, a mensch. Quoted by L. Scheinbaum in *Peninim*, Pinhas 1993.) See also the source at the end of footnote 17.

33. For more on this theme, see *Israel Passover Haggadah*, by Rabbi Menahem Mendel Kasher.

34. See B. Sotah 11a for a similar description of switching the work of men and women. A similar description of wrongly assigned work is also found in relation to the well story and the daughters of Jethro. In *Avot de-Rebbi Natan* (chapter 20) it is related, "He (Moses) rebuked them (the shepherds): Man usually draws the water and woman gives the flock to drink, whereas here the women draw the water and the men water the flocks! [It appears that the women drew the water before the arrival of the other shepherds, who then drove them away and used that water to water their own flocks.] This certainly is a perversion of justice." Josephus (*Antiquities* II, 258), however, states that both tasks were customarily undertaken by women. Interestingly, this is the only one of the three biblical stories mentioned by Josephus.

35. *Li-re'ot* with an 'aleph, as used in the verse, means "to see"; with an 'ayin it means "to be a shepherd." God saw that Moses turned to see and thus he was *ra'ui* (worthy, another phonetically-similar word) to be the shepherd of the Jewish people.

36. The *Tanhuma* (Exodus 10) adds one more reason why Moses was selected: Because Moses put himself in a position in which he was forced to flee to Midian due to his devotion to the Jewish people, he was chosen to be their redeemer. This concept of loyalty is reflected in the Midrash, in Exodus Rabbah 2:2, regarding Moses being tested as a shepherd, which is discussed below.

37. See texts accompanying note 7.

38. According to Shinan, it is not known on what earlier source this story is based. *Midrash Rabbah, Exodus, Chapters 1-14*, Avigdor Shinan, ed. (Israel, Dvir Publishing, 1984) (Hebrew).

39. The *Tanhuma Yashan* also adds Amos as having been tested as a shepherd, based on Amos 7:15. Other versions of Exodus Rabbah add Jacob, Ezekiel, and Amos. On leaders of Israel as shepherds see B. Sotah 36b commenting on Psalms 80:2. See also the last stanza of the Hanukkah song *Ma'oz Tzur*; Micah 5:4 and B. Sukkah 52b.

40. Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, *'Oznayim la-Torah* (Israel, 1980) (Hebrew), on Exodus 3:1.

41. Another example of a leader whom the Midrash portrays as being selected twice is Gideon. The Midrash (*Tanhuma* in *Ginze Schechter* I, 131-133; also a shorter version in *Tanhuma, Shoftim* 4) says: "Said the Holy One to him, 'You fulfilled the commandment to honor your father, you are worthy that My children should be redeemed through you.'" (This may be parallel to Moses and the sheep.) The Midrash later states: "The Holy One replied: 'By your life, you are speaking in defense, and on behalf of my children, then you are worthy that I speak with you.'" (This may be parallel to God observing Moses 'turning,' and therefore speaking to him directly.)

42. Just as this explains why the rabbis added the second test, that of positive leadership, of which there is only the slightest hint in the Bible, this might also explain the story in Genesis Rabbah 100:22 that Moses ruled in Midian as king for forty years. Through the stories of Moses leading Midian and leading sheep as a shepherd, the rabbis are grooming him, in a Midrashic sense, for his true role, that of positive leader of Israel.

43. It is possible that the Bible discusses only the first quality, that of being a leader who can fight evil, and not the second, because Moses was actually weak in that area. It was the first quality that was needed to facilitate the Exodus and the wandering in the desert. Possibly, however, he was not as strong in the leadership quality of being able to lead in a positive sense, and, hence, was rejected from leading the Jews into the land of Israel. In a similar vein, see Nathaniel Helfgot, "Moses Struck the Rock: Numbers 20 and the Leadership of Moses," *Tradition* 27:3 (Spring 1993), pp. 51-58, for a discussion of Moses being the right type of leader for the Exodus generation but the wrong type of leader for the new generation about to enter the Land of Israel.

## ***Birkhat Ha-Gomel: A Study in Cultural Context and Halakhic Practice***

**ROCHELLE L. MILLEN**

"IF THERE'S NOTHING MORE POWERFUL THAN AN idea whose time has come, there is nothing more ubiquitously pervasive than an idea whose time won't go."<sup>1</sup> These words clearly articulate the dilemma not only of feminism in general, but also of Jewish feminism in particular. The idea whose time has come is twofold: the communal acknowledgement of the value of that which is distinctly feminine; and the religious recognition of woman as a public person. The notions whose time won't go are the converse: the lack, and downgrading, of rituals that celebrate the uniquely feminine, and the insistence in traditional circles that woman's public (religious) role, even when explicitly permitted, recommended, or required by Halakhah, is not to be encouraged nor taught nor spoken about. The deeply ingrained axiom of rabbinic law, that the private sphere is more appropriately woman's,<sup>2</sup> has been relentlessly dissected, analyzed, and attacked by feminists and social theorists of all persuasions.<sup>3</sup> These scholars question whether women should function less in the public sphere and more in the private arena. Illegitimate argumentation to this effect can raise the status quo to the level of prescriptive law. This argumentation is founded on several premises, primary among which is the notion that women may form relationships differently from men.<sup>4</sup> This observation is then viewed as an established fact which can validly be used to justify legal decisions. Thus an illicit causal connection is established in both religious law and general societal attitudes. Elements of cultural development and historical context are downplayed, as what was the norm in social behavior becomes the norm forever and absolutely.<sup>5</sup>

The blessing of *birkhat ha-gomel* and the laws surrounding its recitation provide a paradigmatic case illustrating the reluctance of religious leaders to implement the very laws to which they claim adherence by basing halakhic decisions on this illegitimate or narrow type of legal reasoning. *Birkhat ha-gomel* is a blessing to be said upon emerging safely from a situation of danger. At one time, it seems to have been recited publicly by women after childbirth. The law requiring a woman to recite *birkhat hagomel* recognizes woman's autonomy and personhood and acknowledges her uniquely female contribution to the ongoing reproduction of society. The unwillingness of many communities under the influence of their rabbis to actualize women's recitation of *birkhat ha-gomel*, especially after childbirth, manifests a deeply ingrained animus against and discomfort with woman as an autonomous human being having a

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ROCHELLE L. MILLEN is Associate Professor of Religion at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio.

distinctive function and being a public person. I will give the background to *birkhat hagomel*, analyze some of the halakhic issues involved, discuss the responsa specifically about women, and briefly remark upon some current synagogue practices.

*Birkhat ha-gomel*, or the benediction for deliverance from a situation of danger, is one of the blessings of thanksgiving, or *birkhot hoda'ah*, that praises God for the good (or bad) which befall a person. The Babylonian Talmud states:

There are four [classes of people] who have to offer thanksgiving; those who have crossed the sea, those who have traversed the wilderness, one who has recovered from an illness, and a prisoner who has been set free. . . . And he must utter his thanksgiving in the presence of ten, as it is written, "Let them exalt Him in the assembly (*kahal*) of the people (Ps. 107:32)." (Berakhot 54b, Soncino translation, 1960.)

The person offering the blessing states, "Blessed is God who bestows loving-kindnesses," while the assembly of people responds, "God who has bestowed all good upon you will yet bestow all good upon you, Selah." According to some early authorities,<sup>6</sup> *birkhat ha-gomel* is said in place of the *korban todah*, or the ancient sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Two textual points of importance must be noted. First, the commentary says *tzrikhin*, "have to" or "must," rather than *hayavin*, "obligated," although here the meaning of the two terms is very close. The distinction appears to be that failure to implement an obligation is considered a sin of omission, while the non-performance of a strongly recommended *mitzvah* does not carry the same legal weight. What is the import of this for women? It seems omission is not as important as failure to perform a *mitzvah*, or commandment. This leads the way to women neglecting to say the blessing or even being barred from it. Second, the text states that *birkhat ha-gomel* must be recited in the presence of ten, using as proof-text the verse in Psalms, "Let them exalt God in the assembly of people." The phrase *kahal 'am*, or "assembly of people" is considered to consist of ten,<sup>7</sup> but some authorities specify that it refers only to ten men, not to ten persons. This distinction has important practical implications for the recitation of *birkhat ha-gomel* by women.

The long-held custom has been for a person who has been delivered from danger to say *birkhat ha-gomel* in the synagogue after the reading of the Torah; there ten men (persons) are gathered.<sup>8</sup> The four situations of danger described in the Talmud apply to all persons, male or female; hence both men and women are required to say the blessing. A woman after childbirth is considered one who has recovered from an illness, i.e., in the third category, as indicated by the special prayer for a new mother's well-being made in the synagogue after childbirth.<sup>9</sup> This means all women after childbirth (in addition to the other circumstances described in the text), according to the law, ought to recite *birkhat ha-gomel*. However, there are conflicting legal (halakhic) opinions concerning this.

The Magen Avraham,<sup>10</sup> one of the “later authorities,” or *aharonim*,<sup>11</sup> wrote a commentary on the legal code of the fifteenth century, the *Shulhan Arukh* (Set Table).<sup>12</sup> In it he comments upon the words of a contemporary, Rabbi Haim Benvenisti, whose legal work is known as the *Keneset ha-Gedolah*.<sup>13</sup> Benvenisti states:

I am astonished at the universal custom that women do not say the blessing of *birkhat ha-gomel*. It seems to me that this custom is in error, since *gomel* is a blessing of thanksgiving, and who exempted women from this [type of] blessing? And if [the custom of omission exists] because one must recite it [the blessing] before ten [men], and it is not honorable for a woman to stand before men, since “all glorious is the King’s daughter within the palace,”<sup>14</sup> this argument is not adequate to exempt a woman from her obligation to recite this blessing. One may recite it without ten men, and therefore she should say it before one man or several women.<sup>15</sup>

The Magen Avraham’s comment is: “Perhaps [the authorities] refused to permit women’s recitation of this blessing because it is an option (*reshut*).”<sup>16</sup> Several implications can be drawn from the interpretations of Benvenisti and the Magen Avraham.

First, both are surprised at the fact that Jewish women did not recite *birkhat ha-gomel*. From this can be deduced that their reading of the sources is that women should say *birkhat ha-gomel*. That is, they are noting a discrepancy between prescription and sociological description, viz., the status quo, the lived religious life in the seventeenth-century Polish and Turkish Jewish communities.

Second, Benvenisti attempts to explain the reason for the “mistaken custom” of women not reciting *birkhat ha-gomel*. Clearly, according to the source, women should not be exempt from its recitation. If one follows the opinion that one must say *birkhat ha-gomel* in a congregation of ten men, one may observe that this usually is not done by women. The customary separation of the genders in traditional Judaism has nurtured the concept that it is inappropriate—even shameful—for a woman to perform or speak (even a prayer) in public before men. However, there are alternative ways of facilitating the recitation<sup>17</sup> of *birkhat ha-gomel* by women. The recitation of *birkhat ha-gomel* takes priority over presumed considerations of modesty and public recitation. The implication intended may be that woman can recite the blessing before ten men. If she, however, or the men, deem it improper, then the other options of saying *birkhat ha-gomel* before a group of women or a single man ought to be used.<sup>18</sup>

Third, there is an obvious difference of opinion between the two authorities as to the nature of the requirement to recite *birkhat ha-gomel*. According to Benvenisti, the thanksgiving expressed to God is an obligation; he states: “. . . this argument [of the inherent immodesty or dishonor of a woman standing before ten men] is not adequate to exempt a woman from her obligation<sup>19</sup> to recite this blessing.” He intensifies the more ambiguous “must” or “needs to”

in Berakhot, the original text, interpreting it as “is obligated to,” which has much stronger implications. The Magen Avraham, however, in attempting to understand the obvious disparity between what seemed to be a theoretical requirement—that women say the blessing after childbirth and at other appropriate times—but in fact was not observed in practice, assumes that rabbinic authorities did not permit<sup>20</sup> women to recite the blessing since it was optional (*reshut*), and entailed the problem of the questionable propriety of a woman saying it before ten men. Otherwise, the custom of woman refraining from reciting *birkhat ha-gomel* remains for him both puzzling and illogical.

The halakhic argumentation on this issue continued into our century. The Kaf Ha-Haim,<sup>21</sup> whose legal compendium was written for the twentieth-century Sephardic communities of Baghdad and Jerusalem, says the following:

Women are obligated in *birkhat ha-gomel* . . . but it is not for her to make the blessing before ten [men] like a man does, since it is not honorable for a woman to stand before men. Therefore she should recite the blessing from the women’s gallery in the synagogue so ten men in the synagogue will hear her, or before ten of her [male] relatives and friends; if not, she should say the blessing without God’s name.<sup>22</sup>

The assumption here is that *kahal-‘am*, or “assembly of the people,” is constituted only by ten men. For were a woman to recite the blessing before a group not containing ten males, God’s name would be omitted, as is the custom in Judaism where a blessing requires the presence of the “community.”

In contrast are the words of the late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century rabbinic authority, Rabbi Meir Ha-Cohen, who authored (and is known as) the *Mishnah Berurah*:<sup>23</sup>

It is a widespread custom that women do not recite *birkhat ha-gomel*, and the reason is that it is said before ten [men] and to do so is not the way of women; but there are those who have written that it is correct that she should recite the blessing before ten [men]—at the very least before women and one man.<sup>24</sup>

Several conclusions may be drawn from the above. First, from the earlier authorities’ astonishment that women did not recite the blessing, which was seen as an obligation, comes the viewpoint that its non-observance is widespread. Thus is validated the concept that the longer an action or behavior is maintained as standard and expected ideal practice, even if it violates the original prescribed observance, the more likely it will become normative (real). Second, the *Mishnah Berurah* obviously defines *kahal-‘am* as consisting of either ten men or a group of women and at least one man. This is different from the earlier opinion of the Kaf Ha-Haim, for whom *kahal-‘am* (the community) is only a male category.

A somewhat earlier authority, writing in the nineteenth century and known as the Arukh Ha-Shulhan,<sup>25</sup> expresses a viewpoint both similar to and different

from these two perspectives. He states:

It is customary for women not to recite *birkhat ha-gomel* and there is no reason for this [emphasis mine]. It only seems to be because the custom is to say the blessing during the Torah reading; therefore [people] imagine that women are not obligated in this blessing. Thus it is correct that women should recite the blessing. Perhaps [the reason women don't recite it is] because it is written "in an assembly of people" [*be-kahal 'am*], and women are not designated as *kahal* and to recite the blessing before ten men is improper and therefore women were prevented from doing it.<sup>26</sup>

As in the earlier citations, the Arukh Ha-Shulhan is trying to understand why women did not observe what for him is an obvious obligation and constitutes correct religious behavior.

From the confusion about what women should do and what women in fact did arose the custom for a husband to recite *birkhat ha-gomel* for his wife after childbirth. Halakhic authorities wavered on accepting this innovation, some asserting its wrongfulness, since the man has no obligation and the woman is an autonomous person. Others proclaimed the appropriateness of a husband acting in his wife's behalf, based on the principle of *ishto ke-gufo* ("his wife is as himself").<sup>27</sup>

Several things can be learned from this survey of responsa. First, all the cited authorities agree that women ought to recite *birkhat ha-gomel*, and are forced to find an explanation for the custom among women in most Jewish communities not to do so. Some of the reasons given seem somewhat contrived, but they constitute legitimate attempts to make sense of socioreligious behavior that contravenes prescribed law. In the development of Halakhah, there are many examples of cultural factors influencing the non-actualization of a law deemed ideal from a theoretical framework. In the area of women and Halakhah, for instance, three or more women are obligated or have the option (there are two opinions) of saying the grace after meals, or *birkhat ha-mazon*, with an introduction called *zimun*. However, until the last two decades or so, *zimun* for women was hardly ever utilized. Many halakhic authorities from the early Middle Ages on question the discrepancy between the talmudic sources and the actual behavior of women, resorting even to assuming that the ignorance of women is a substantial contributing factor.<sup>28</sup> In attempting to understand why certain observances—or lack of them—are different from their articulation in rabbinic sources, commentators on these sources were compelled to recognize the power and pervasiveness of cultural attitudes.<sup>29</sup>

Second, the expectation that women ought to recite this blessing manifests an understanding—however faint by our standards—of woman as autonomous person. It is clear from the responsa that there is either an obligation or strongly-based custom for a woman to say *birkhat ha-gomel*. No one can act for her. Woman is perceived as a full spiritual being whose relationship with God must be molded by her own efforts. Therefore others cannot act on her



behalf. The ideal form of the law on *birkhat ha-gomel* recognizes the responsibility woman has to speak in her own voice; her personhood is affirmed. This is so despite the limitations on women's independence and autonomy evident in other areas.<sup>30</sup>

Third, the reasons in the responsa why women customarily fail to recite *birkhat ha-gomel* hinge on the public/private question: Can a woman recite the blessing publicly before ten men? This theme, which appears in various forms in all the responsa cited, relates to the discomfort of men with women in the public sphere. This discomfort is the result of many factors: the strict differentiation of gender roles; and the illegitimate extrapolation of value from this fact. That is, since the work of the world has been divided into tasks suitable exclusively for men and others exclusively for women, the world ought always to be so structured. An additional variable is that women thus become unaccustomed to the public role, and men to seeing and accepting women as competent public persons. Finally, and perhaps most essentially, is the hierarchy of power, of weakness, submission, and passivity as opposed to initiative, domination, and action. There is a strong sexual basis to this hierarchy; the cultural limitations placed on womanhood can be seen to derive from a fear of the power of female sexuality and nurturance.<sup>31</sup> This, in turn, may be a projection of the male's fear of his own sexuality. Somehow the world seems safer and less threatening when both men and women know their proper places. The public arena is normative, as is maleness; women, relegated to the private sphere, are "other." And "otherness," as Simone de Beauvoir saw most clearly, implies alienation from power.<sup>32</sup> Lastly, a study of the responsa demonstrates that what people actually do has a significant impact on how religious law, custom, and culture develop. Tradition is the outcome of a dialectical process involving law, custom, and cultural context. The religious view that law alone determines practice is demonstrated to be untrue in the above analysis.

Why has the recitation of *birkhat ha-gomel* by women almost completely atrophied? Especially after childbirth, it seems to me, the blessing of thanksgiving offers a unique opportunity for the proclamation of the value of a distinctly feminine experience and contribution to society. Among Lubavitch Hasidim, women after childbirth routinely recite *birkhat ha-gomel* in the synagogue during the Torah reading; the same is true in some synagogues in Israel.<sup>33</sup> On occasion it has been done elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> But *birkhat ha-gomel* for women remains a "special request" option. Among mainstream traditional Jews, it is not recited as a matter of course and is still not expected and accepted practice. Among the Conservative synagogues I polled, rabbis told me they don't have enough *aliyot* (i.e. stops in the Torah reading when a person is called up to offer the blessing on the Torah);<sup>35</sup> or women don't need to recite *birkhat ha-gomel* since they are more publicly involved in the Conservative service; or the rabbis only inform certain women for whom the blessing would be "meaningful" about the option of reciting it. These seem to be weak excuses for more

powerful underlying determinants. It must be noted that in many Conservative synagogues, men do not routinely say *birkhat ha-gomel* either. Perhaps decorum is valued more highly than giving the opportunity (to congregants) to offer the prayer of *birkhat ha-gomel*. Certainly calling extra people up to the Torah lengthens the service and increases the possibility of noise and distraction from the reading. Or perhaps the motivation is absent due to lack of awareness. The middle-aged daughter of a prominent Conservative cantor told me she never heard of reciting *birkhat ha-gomel* after childbirth, and rarely saw the blessing said at all in her father's synagogue. Obviously, not knowing led to not doing. But young people, it seems, were deliberately not taught. *Birkhat ha-gomel* appears to have a low priority in some Conservative synagogues.

For Jewish women involved in the tradition, the "idea whose time has come" is the regular recitation of *birkhat ha-gomel*, in all designated situations, but especially after childbirth. The "idea whose time won't go" is the ambivalence—in both modern Orthodox and Conservative synagogues—toward making such recitation a usual, accepted, expected part of the communal prayer experience. The mythology of woman as private rather than public person lingers on—not only in the religious literature, but also in deeply ingrained societal attitudes.<sup>36</sup>

For centuries the parallel oppositions of inner/outer space, female/male, nature/culture, home/society, nurture/action, emotional/rational, recipient/giver have framed our cultural outlook. They remain often unarticulated assumptions of social, religious, and cultural history, and have deeply influenced the notion in Judaism that woman's intrinsic nature is private.<sup>37</sup>

In the Jewish legal tradition, however, women are not routinely treated as non-persons. Can we then infer that much of the elimination of women from public prayer—in fact the neglect of women's prayer in general<sup>38</sup>—in the reponsa is more culturally than legally mandated?

The discussion of *birkhat ha-gomel* demonstrates that the myth of woman as private person is not an idea held sacred in the reponsa. It is an idea whose time must go, to make room for those ideas whose time has come. What must go is our interpretation of cultural custom as the absolute law; what must come is a more thorough search of the law to find support for new or renewed behaviors that more accurately reflect its versatility and variations.<sup>39</sup>

## NOTES

1. Elizabeth Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology* (New York: Dell, 1971), p. 7.

2. The verse frequently cited as a prooftext is *Kol kevodo bat melekh penima*, "All glorious is the King's daughter within the palace" (Ps. 45:14.)

3. See for instance Elizabeth Janeway, *op. cit.*; Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990); the various essays in Elizabeth Koltun, ed., *The Jewish Woman* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976; Susannah Heschel, ed., *On Being A Jew-*

*ish Feminist* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983); Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, coeditors, *Womanspirit Rising* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979); *Weaving the Visions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989); Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law* (New York: Schocken, 1984); Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981); Moshe Meiselman, *Jewish Woman in Jewish Law* (New York: Ktav, 1978); Friedfertig and Schapiro, ed., *The Modern Jewish Woman* (New York: Lubavitch, 1981); Maggie Scarf, *Unfinished Business: Pressure Points in the Lives of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980); Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, second edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

4. See, for instance, Carol Gilligan, *op. cit.*; Maggie Scarf, *op. cit.*; and Moshe Meiselman, *op. cit.*

5. The relationship of historical and cultural factors in the ongoing formation of Halakhah is the crucial issue here.

6. The early authorities are called *rishonim*; they are generally understood to be commentators on the Gemara and writers of responsa literature from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. The *rishon* holding the opinion cited here is the *Rosh* on Berakhot 59.

7. See *Gilyon ha-Shas* on Berakhot 54b; Rashi on Ketubot 76.

8. Other reasons are given in the *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, vol. 4, S.Y. Zevin, ed. (Jerusalem: Talmudic Encyclopedia Pub. Ltd., 1962), p. 318.

9. *Mi sheberakh* . . .

10. Abraham Gambiner, Polish rabbi (1637-1683).

11. The period of the *aharonim* is approximately from the sixteenth century to the present.

12. Compiled by Joseph Caro (1488-1475), with glosses by Moses Isserles (1525-1572).

13. Rabbi Haim Benvenisti of Turkey (1603-1673) was known as the Keneset Ha-Gedolah, the name of a unique halakhic work he authored. It consists of analyses of the codes of the Tur and Beit Yosef.

14. Psalms, 45:14; see footnote 2. But note the talmudic dictum, *Divre Torah me-divre kabbalah lo yalfinan*, i.e., principles of law cannot be derived from the Prophets or Writings. Nonetheless, this verse from Psalms is frequently cited as "proof" of the preferred or mandated private arena of women's activities, as well as of woman's intrinsic "nature."

15. Quoted in Elyakim Ellinson, *The Woman and the Commandments*, pt. I (Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency), 1979 (Hebrew), p. 137. The translation is mine. Also cited with additions in *Magene 'Aretz: Shulkhan Arukh, 'Orach Haim* (New York: 1939), which contains the commentary of the Magen Avraham, p. 164 (Hebrew).

16. *Loc. cit.*

17. See *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, *op. cit.*, for a discussion of these options.

18. Why does Benvenisti say, "before one man or several women?" It is clearly preferable to recite *birkhat ha-gomel* before as many persons as possible ("an assembly"), minimally ten. But if one follows the minority ruling (or the "after the fact" ruling), one has met the requirements of the proper recitation of the blessing even if said before a group smaller than ten (see *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, *op. cit.*, p. 318). And if "modesty" is a problem when a woman is before an assembly of men, she may recite the blessing before even one man, or as many women as she wishes (fewer or greater than ten).

19. As quoted in Ellinson, *op. cit.* The word used is *nithayva*.

20. Note his reasoning: rabbinic authorities have the power to prohibit that which is optional.

21. Rabbi Ya'akov Haim Sofer of Baghdad and Jerusalem (1870-1939).

22. Ellinson, *op. cit.*, p. 137. The translation is mine.

23. Rabbi Meir Ha-Cohen Israel (Kagan) (1838-1933).

24. Ellinson, *op. cit.* The translation is mine.

25. Rabbi Michel Halevi Epstein (1829-1908).

26. *Arukh ha-Shulhan*, pt. I (New York: Feldheim, 1950), *siman* 219:6, p. 173.

27. See Ellinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

28. The discussion about women and *zimun* occurs primarily in two places in the talmudic literature, Berakhot and 'Erukhin. See Mishnah Berakhot 6:2; T.B. Berakhot 35b and 'Erukhin 3a, especially Tosafot on Berakhot 35b. For a summary of various early and later authorities, see Ellinson, *op. cit.* pp. 77-80 and Joel B. Wolowelsky, "The Eating Fellowship: An Exploration," *Tradition* 16, Spring 1977, pp. 75-82.

29. For other examples affecting women's issues see Naomi G. Cohen, "Women and the Study of Talmud," *Tradition* 24, Fall 1988, pp. 28-38; Areyeh A. Frimer, "Women and Minyan," *Tradition* 23, Summer 1988, pp. 54-78; Rochelle L. Millen, "Women and Kaddish: Reflections on Responsa," *Modern Judaism* 10, Spring 1990, pp. 191-203; Eliezer Berkovits, *Jewish Women in Time and Torah*

(New Jersey: Ktav, 1990); Avraham Weiss, *Women at Prayer* (New Jersey: Ktav, 1990). There are, of course, numerous instances of the influence of cultural factors on the weakening and altering of halakhic norms throughout the vast corpus of Halakah.

30. See, for instance, Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

31. See Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946-1963* (New York: Delacorte, 1977). Also Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) and Nancy Friday, *Jealousy* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

32. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953).

33. Our family witnessed such recitations in the Tzvi Yisrael Synagogue in Talbich, Jerusalem, from 1976-1979. Presumably they continue still. It is interesting to speculate on why the recitation of *birkhat ha-gomel* after childbirth is encouraged among Lubavitcher.

34. For example, Young Israel of West Hempstead, New York; Young Israel of Greenfield, Detroit, Michigan; Lincoln Square Synagogue, New York City. All are Orthodox synagogues.

35. This meant that due to the large number of bar mitzvahs and other family events, there were insufficient *aliyot* to allow for men or women to recite *birkhat ha-gomel*. Usually seven persons are called to the Torah on the Sabbath; additional people may be called up when necessary.

36. See Joel B. Wolowelsky, "Modern Orthodoxy and Women's Changing Self-Perception," *Tradition* 22, Spring 1986, pp. 65-81.

37. See Moshe Meiselman, *Jewish Woman in Jewish Law* (New York: Ktav and Yeshiva University, 1978), chapter two.

38. Except see Chava Weissler, "For Women and for Men Who are Like Women: The Construction of Gender in Yiddish Devotional Literature," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 5, 1989, pp. 7-24; and also "The Religion of Traditional Ashkenazic Women: Some Methodological Issues," *Association for Jewish Studies Review*, 12, Spring 1987, pp. 73-95.

39. Another perspective is to call for a complete overhaul of the halakhic system, based on the presumption that it was formulated entirely by men, and would have been different in both content and form had women been among the lawmakers. A primary advocate of this view is Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990). Also, see Elazar Muskin, "Birkat Ha-Gomel for Women and Children," in the Winter 1988 issue of *Chavrusa*, the newsletter of the rabbinic alumni of Yeshiva University. Muskin quotes Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef who states that we live in a society where men and women congregate for business. Certainly, then, "for a blessing we need not worry about *kol kevodah* . . ." (See notes 2 and 14 above.)

## ***The Bene Israel and the Baghdadis: Two Indian Jewish Communities in Conflict***

**SADOK MASLIYAH**

AT ITS HEIGHT IN THE LATE 1940S, THE JEWISH POPULATION of India numbered 26,000, amidst a population of over three hundred million, but its reputation far exceeded its size. It consisted of four communities: the first two were long-term residents—the Cochin<sup>1</sup> Jews of the Malabar Coast in the southwest, and the “native” Bene Israel<sup>2</sup> of western India. The other two were of more recent vintage: the so-called Baghdadi<sup>3</sup> Jews, who hailed from the Middle Eastern countries of the Ottoman Empire and settled in Bombay and Calcutta; and Jewish refugees from Central Europe fleeing Nazi persecution in the 1930s and '40s.<sup>4</sup> The Cochin Jews, who never numbered more than 2,500, were divided into three endogamous subgroups: white Jews, black Jews (the majority), and *meshuhrrarim* (descendants of manumitted, converted slaves and of the illegitimate offspring of unions between white Jews and native mistresses). The Cochin Jews came to India from various places, including Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, and Spain, at different times from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Motivated by a religious messianic drive, most of them emigrated to Israel in the 1950s. The European refugees mixed mainly with the upper crust of Baghdadis; they numbered perhaps 1,800 at their peak, and included many professionals and industrialists, but after World War II they emigrated to Western European countries and to Australia.

Although the various groups coexisted, the continuous strife between the “white” and “black” Cochin Jews and the tension between the Bene Israel and the Baghdadis in Bombay hampered the development of a cohesive Indian Jewish community. The Jews of India enjoyed all the privileges of citizenship. In contrast to other Jewish communities in Europe and the Middle East, they never experienced persecution. The Bene Israel, in particular, had lived for centuries in harmony with Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. They are perhaps singular among the world’s Jews in that for over a century, a large proportion of their manpower served in the armed forces of the host country.

The Indian caste system<sup>5</sup> enabled the Bene Israel to blend into the Indian society without losing their own distinctive Jewish character. Since the caste system did not allow intermarriage with other castes, the Bene Israel were not totally assimilated into Hindu society, although Indian society, as a whole, practiced tolerance. If the Bene Israel experienced any prejudice at all it was from

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SADOK MASLIYAH, a native of Baghdad, is the Hebrew Branch Chief at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California.

their fellow Jews, the newcomers, the Baghdadis in Bombay.

The doubts that the Baghdadis had about the Bene Israel's origin contributed to the conflict between the two groups. The Bene Israel had no historical records to help them throw light on their obscure early history in India and counter the Baghdadis' charges against them. There was no mention of the Bene Israel in travelers' records, tales, or inscriptions. According to one Bene Israel tradition,<sup>6</sup> their presence on the western coast of India goes back 2,000 years. They claimed to be the descendants of the Ten Tribes of Israel who were shipwrecked off the west coast of India, near Nawgaon on the Konkan coast, in the second century B.C.E. By this account, only seven couples survived, and their offspring were cut off from other Jewish communities for a long time. However, several different theories date the arrival of the Bene Israel to periods ranging from the sixth century B.C.E. to the seventh century C.E., suggesting that they came to India from Palestine, Yemen, Persia, or even Babylon. The Bene Israel gradually dispersed throughout the coastal Konkan villages, living in small communities. They were essentially a rural class who monopolized the industry of oil pressing, hence their name *Telis Shanwar*, or "oil-men who observed Saturday [as their holiday]." They distinguished themselves in the armies of pre-British rulers and, owing to their education, earned promotion to officer ranks<sup>7</sup>.

To establish their rule in Bombay, the British recruited skilled and reliable natives as soldiers in the British Native Infantry Regiments. It was during this period that the Bene Israel (or the "Native Jew Caste,"<sup>8</sup> as they were then called) took advantage of this opportunity and moved to Bombay in 1786 to enlist in the Native Regiments of the British East India Company and to secure other jobs in government and private companies. Under British rule in Bombay, the Bene Israel rose to high military ranks and established a reputation as devoted, efficient, and faithful soldiers. They fought with the British in the Anglo-Marathi wars, the Anglo-Mysore wars, the Anglo-Afghan wars, the Anglo-Burmese wars, the Sikh wars, and during the Indian Mutiny in 1857.

The move of the Bene Israel to Bombay brought rapid social and religious changes. They formed a sizable group and emerged as a strongly knit community bound together by common tradition and heritage. In Bombay they also established themselves as a clerk caste, working in private companies and in different departments of government—customs, railways, and post and telegraph. Some rose to become doctors, engineers, mayors, judges, lawyers, architects, writers, historians, social workers, teachers, and college professors. Since the 1920s, the total number of Bene Israel professionals, however, did not exceed ten percent of the community's population. The Bene Israel women earned a reputation as primary school teachers. However, by the mid-twentieth century, the majority of Bene Israel were lower-middle class, engaged as carpenters, construction builders, mechanics, mill workers, tailors, hospital assistants, and nurses.



As for the Baghdadi community in India,<sup>9</sup> it goes back to approximately 1730, when Joseph Semah from Aleppo settled in Surat,<sup>10</sup> 165 miles north of Bombay, and moved soon thereafter to Bombay. Encouraged by the British to go to India to expand commerce, the Baghdadis established themselves first in Calcutta and then in Bombay, where they formed the Arabian Jewish Merchant Colony. The term “Baghdadi” or “Iraqi” soon included, as well, Jews from Syria, Aden, Yemen, and even non-Arabic speaking countries like Persia<sup>11</sup> and Afghanistan. Some of the pioneers of this wave of immigrants settled in Surat around 1775; other moved to Bombay around 1790 and later branched out to Poona and Calcutta, as well as neighboring Asian countries. To a great extent, the term “Baghdadi” comprised those groups who came to India from the Asiatic countries of the Ottoman Empire and who identified with the Iraqi Jews. At its peak, the Baghdadi community in Bombay numbered no more than 2,500, out of approximately 20,000 Jews in all India.<sup>12</sup>

In 1833 the Baghdadi community in Bombay gained in prestige and power with the arrival of a figure of great distinction: David Sassoon (1792-1864),<sup>13</sup> who had founded a trading house known throughout the world, and who was escaping the tyranny of Daud Pasha, the Turkish ruler of Baghdad. With the help of his many sons, David pioneered in the import-export of textiles, English piece goods, and opium, providing employment in his mills for many thousands of Bene Israel, Baghdadis, Hindus, and Muslims. He and his associates, including prominent families such as the Ezras, Eliases, Gabbays, Kadoories, and Abrahams, became wealthy merchants or acted as middlemen for the large cotton, jute, and tobacco-processing plants. The Sassoons soon became unchallenged leaders of the Indian Jewish community, as well as founders of the illustrious merchant-house that earned them the sobriquet “Rothschilds of the East.” A closely-knit group, the Baghdadi Jews were the heirs of a rich culture and tradition, deeply rooted in Jewish learning and devoted to their own liturgy and rite.

In the early nineteenth century, the Baghdadis and the Bene Israel lived peacefully together, a harmony that expressed itself in the fact that in 1831 the leaders of both groups jointly submitted petitions to the authorities concerning grievances connected with the Jewish cemetery in Bombay. This harmony, however, was short-lived. Five years later, a number of Baghdadi dignitaries petitioned the authorities to erect a wall dividing the burial grounds of the two groups. In that petition, the Baghdadis referred to the Bene Israel as a “tribe” and “natives of India,” in contrast to themselves, who were “faithful to their Arabian fathers.”<sup>14</sup> The issue of the cemetery wall was undoubtedly one of the causes that lead to an ever-increasing antagonism between the Baghdadis and the Bene Israel for over a century.

As soon as the Baghdadi Jews gained prestige, wealth, and prosperity, in their relations with the Bene Israel they sought to play the role of the superior caste. The fact that they were much more familiar with the rituals and religious

practices of Judaism than the Bene Israel gave them a spiritual advantage, so to speak. The Baghdadi Jews in India remained attached to the Jewish teachings and traditions of Baghdad, seeking guidance from that city's *hahamim* (rabbis). When they first settled in Bombay, their strict orthodoxy fascinated the Bene Israel who, in turn, did not challenge the Baghdadi superiority.

The arrogance of the Baghdadis defined the pattern of relations between them and the Bene Israel and caused the latter much sorrow. The Bene Israel feared that the Baghdadis considered them Jewish outcasts. Indeed, the Baghdadis denied that Bene Israel were of pure Jewish blood and emphasized that there was a vital difference between them and their dubious coreligionists. The fair-complexioned Baghdadis felt that they would lose status if they became associated with the "colored" Bene Israel. (Under the British Raj white skin was prized and it was no wonder that the Baghdadis tried to create the impression that "pure" Jews were all fair.) While the Bene Israel fully identified themselves, culturally and socially, with the colored multitudes of India, the Baghdadis sought to be accepted as equals to Europeans, especially to the white rulers of India, "to pass on a white Man's ticket," as one prominent Bene Israel leader claimed.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the Baghdadis felt that all they had in common with the Bene Israel was religion, and even this was questionable. They tended to view the Bene Israel as poor, uneducated, and backwards.

The growing strife between the two communities was undoubtedly exacerbated by the general British policy of keeping Indians in their place, which emerged after the Mutiny of 1857. It is likely that the Baghdadis' attitude toward the Bene Israel was also influenced by the social structure of the Indian caste system, in which concepts of purity and pollution were extremely important, connoting spiritual merit and, indirectly, holiness.<sup>16</sup>

The upward movement of a caste was marked by, among other things, the banning of divorce and widow-remarriage. Wishing to rise in public esteem, the Bene Israel adopted some of the customs and values of higher castes. They refrained from marrying widows and divorced wives who had separated from their husbands without following Jewish Law. They also abstained from eating beef and, until their immigration to Israel in the 1950s, believed that beef was prohibited in the Hebrew Scriptures. While still in the Konkan they made efforts to leave oil pressing for more prestigious occupations. But although they took to agriculture, entered the army, and engaged in other rewarding services, their attempts to raise their status met with limited success.

The Bene Israel, in accordance with caste tradition, were divided into black (*Kala*) and white (*Gora*) Bene Israel. The restrictions on social relations between the two groups resembled those of Hindu castes. The *Gora* were believed to be descendants of the seven couples who landed on the Konkan coast, while the *Kala* bore the stigma of their descent from illicit unions between Bene Israel men and non-Bene Israel slaves. *Gora* and *Kala* neither intermarried nor ate together until just a few years prior to their immigration to Israel.

They did worship in the same synagogue, but the *Kala* were offered the sanctified wine after the prayer services on Sabbaths and holy days only after the *Gora* had been accommodated. *Kala* were not permitted to wear prayer shawls. Despite their strenuous struggle during the second half of the nineteenth century to achieve ritual equality, their efforts failed.

Although the Bene Israel distinguished between descendants of mixed marriages and pure Bene Israel, the Baghdadis were not inclined to recognize this distinction and some Baghdadis even thought that the Bene Israel were originally Indians who had converted to Judaism. In addition, the Baghdadis not only questioned the purity of the Bene Israel but also raised doubts about their religious orthodoxy. For instance, the Bene Israel did not observe the biblical injunction of *yibbum*, whereby a man is required to marry the widow of his deceased brother if the latter had died childless, or *halitza*, whereby the surviving brother could formally refuse to marry his sister-in-law, thus setting her free to marry again according to her own choice (Deut. 25:5-10). The Bene Israel insisted that many of the advanced Jewish communities in the West had abandoned the practices of *yibbum* and *halitza* and that there was no reason to adopt them in order to please the Baghdadis. (Although *yibbum* and *halitza* do not seem to have existed among the Bene Israel, they did have a custom whereby a man intending to marry a childless widow had to pay a small sum to the synagogue authorities, which could be claimed by the surviving brother if he so desired.) The Bene Israel pointed out that although there was reference to *yibbum* in the Bible, there was none to *halitza*.<sup>17</sup> As for the charge that the Bene Israel did not observe the ritual of *mikveh*, the Bene Israel countered that there was nothing holy about the practice, and that their women preferred to clean themselves daily from tap water rather than in the "cesspool" of the *mikveh*. To the charge that pure Jewish blood does not flow in the veins of the Bene Israel, the latter retorted that there is hardly a group in the world more mixed than the Jews, and that indeed the Bene Israel are less mixed than Jews elsewhere because of the rigid Indian caste system.

The problem of intermarriage between the two communities was for long a concern of the Baghdadi and the Bene Israel. With few exceptions, no intermarriages took place during the entire nineteenth century. Some young Bene Israel tried to assimilate into the Baghdadi community, but most Baghdadis were reluctant to intermarry with the Bene Israel; marriages between educated Bene Israel men and lower-class Baghdadi girls were considered a disgrace by the Bene Israel. Even in the 1960s, when fewer than 4,000 Jews remained in India, intermarriages between the two groups were rare. The Baghdadis continued to refer questions of intermarriages to their rabbis in Baghdad and Jerusalem.

The growing division between the Baghdadis and the Bene Israel manifested itself not only in the question of intermarriage, but also in the matter of separate cemeteries and, more painful to the Bene Israel, in not being allowed

to participate in synagogue services with the Baghdadis. In the late-nineteenth century, after the Sassoons bought new land and consecrated it as a Baghdadi and Cochin cemetery, the old Bene Israel cemetery in Bombay filled up. The Baghdadi Jews did not allow the Bene Israel to bury their dead in the new Baghdadi cemetery while the Bene Israel were waiting to procure a new burial ground of their own. Nor did the Baghdadis allow the Bene Israel to use their old cemetery in the Byculla District, because, according to the Sassoon trust deed, it was meant for Baghdadis only.

Further, there was the matter of the exclusion of the Bene Israel from some of the charity funds established by the Sassoon family. The charity trusts established around the turn of the century by Sir Jacob Sassoon for the Jews of Bombay expressly excluded the Bene Israel and the black Jews of Cochin from their benefits. The Rachel Sassoon Dispensary also excluded the "Bene-Israelite" community residing in Bombay, which, in turn, widened the cleavage between the two groups. In 1932 the trust fund of Sassoon J. David decided to give money to the J.J. Hospital in Bombay, provided that a certain number of beds were reserved for Jews. Sir Alwyn Ezra, a nephew of Sassoon J. David and the chief trustee of the fund, objected to the inclusion of the Bene Israel under the category of Jews. After lengthy correspondence, however, the Bombay government concluded that, for all official purposes, the Bene Israel should be considered a part of the Jewish community.<sup>18</sup>

Upon their arrival in Bombay, the Baghdadis were puzzled by some of the practices that the Bene Israel had incorporated into their rituals. The Baghdadis knew very little about Bene Israel history and they took a dim view of the Bene Israel's assimilation into Indian society. Indeed, the Bene Israel had adopted Indian customs, values, manners, and even names. By the eighteenth century it was hard to recognize them as Jews, though they retained some characteristics of the Jewish faith.

Prior to their religious revival, the Bene Israel had neither Hebrew prayer books nor the Bible or the Talmud, yet they practiced circumcision and retained Saturday as their weekly day of rest and solemn observance. They also retained in memory the *Shema*, the confession of Jewish faith, which they recited at every conceivable religious occasion—fast days, births, marriages, burials. They also maintained the distinguishing Israelite practice of wearing the side-locks of the hair in front of the ears (Lev. 19:22). Like the Hindus, the Bene Israel abstained from eating beef. They ate fowl, sheep, and goats, removing only the sinew in the leg (Gen. 32:32), or otherwise abstained from eating the hind quarters of the animal together. They followed the Jewish law by not eating the meat of animals which had died naturally or been strangled or torn by beasts of prey.

In their religious rites, the Bene Israel adopted some Hindu and Muslim elements, but most of these were abandoned as a result of the teachings of Cochin and Baghdadi Jews and Christian missionaries. Among such rites was

the use of incense at a number of ceremonial occasions, following the Hindu practice. Another custom, traceable to the Hindu reverence for the Ganges River, entailed throwing the shaved hair of a seven-year-old boy into the river after redeeming a vow. Other prominent elements in the religious rites of the Bene Israel were the use of *subja*, or fragrant herbs, the *malida*<sup>19</sup> and other Hindu ceremonies of food offerings. The Bene Israel followed Muslim laws of inheritance and burial customs and buried their dead in Muslim cemeteries in places where there were no Bene Israel burial grounds.

The fasts and festivals observed by the Bene Israel showed remarkable resemblance to, and correspondences of dates with, those of the Jews elsewhere. Certain omissions and deviations occurred, however, from what would now be considered the correct method of observance. The calculations of the Jewish and the Indians months are almost the same, as both follow the lunar calendar. The only difference between the two is twelve hours, but the exact dates of celebrating the Jewish holidays seemed not to have been observed. Hayeem Kehimkar, a Bene Israel historian, holds that many of the Bene Israel observances conformed to mishnaic standards rather than to those of the more developed rabbinic Judaism.

Furthermore, names of fasts and festivals<sup>20</sup> lost their Hebrew names. Instead, they came to be called by Hindu and Marathi names and were characterized by the Marathi designation *san*, which denotes a religious season. The names of the Jewish festivals were taken from the domestic usage connected with their observances, and in some cases, from the fact that these festivals coincided with well-known Hindu ones. The Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashana, was celebrated only one day, not two, and the Feast of Tabernacles was observed a fortnight after its true date. The ritual of the redemption of the first-born son (*pidyon ha-ben*) was performed after the fortieth day of birth instead of the thirtieth (Num. 18:16). In celebrating bar mitzvah, the young celebrant was not called up to the reading of the Law on the Sabbath following his thirteenth birthday, because the main religious guide of the Bene Israel was the Pentateuch, in which bar mitzvah is not mentioned. The Bene Israel celebrated the popular Hindu Feast of Holi, which coincided with Purim. Over the years, Passover was forgotten, as the Bene Israel celebrated the spring Hindu "Festival of Jar-Closing" instead.

The encounter of the Bene Israel with the Christian missionaries in the early nineteenth century was an additional cause for alienation of the Baghdadi Jews from the Bene Israel. However, this also served as a reason for the Baghddadis to introduce the Bene Israel to Jewish rituals and practices. The various missionaries<sup>21</sup> did not neglect their primary purpose of attempting to convert the Bene Israel to Christianity, but it was necessary first to concentrate on the teaching of Hebrew and Bible. Thus, they translated the Bible into Marathi, published a Hebrew-Marathi grammar, and introduced Hebrew into the syllabus of the University of Bombay. They also established many schools in Bombay and

in the outlying villages providing secular education in English. The Bene Israel benefited from this, as it enabled them to assume clerical positions and to contact their coreligionists in the West (mainly the United Kingdom). The Bene Israel eagerly accepted the opportunities offered by the missionaries to learn Hebrew and English but strongly resisted attempts at conversion to Christianity. With the decline of the missionary influence, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the Bene Israel began to rely more on secular schools and in 1875 started one of their own in Bombay.

Although the Baghdadi elite often referred to the Bene Israel as poor and uneducated, a great many Baghdadis actually lived in the same circumstances. There was a social stratification within the Baghdadi community itself, based on economic status. Those Baghdadis who lived in the Byculla District were considered unrefined and clannish and were looked down on by the wealthy Baghdadis, who lived in the prestigious Fort District. The Byculla children attended the Sir Jacob Sassoon Free School, while the Fort children attended private Christian schools, which offered a better education. The “enlightened” Baghdadi children of the Fort did not mix with the “illiterate” children of the Byculla.

The Baghdadis and the Bene Israel found it necessary to establish separate schools, which in turn led to separate communal organizations. The Baghdadi schools enjoyed greater prestige and financial resources than the Bene Israel schools, which drew much of their financial support from British Jewry. During the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth, the Baghdadi schools accepted only a few Bene Israel children, but later, due to the emigration of the Baghdadis, the Sir Jacob Sassoon Free School began to admit more Bene Israel children, and even non-Jewish children. Whereas the Baghdadi schools attracted Bene Israel, the latter’s clubs drew some Baghdadis from the poorer section of Bombay. The few affluent Baghdadis who joined Bene Israel organizations looked upon their membership as a sort of social work—setting an example of Jewish orthodoxy to the Bene Israel. The separate schools, synagogues, clubs, welfare organizations, and social associations of course served further to estrange the two communities from each other.

Indeed, the dissociation of the Baghdadis from the Bene Israel was based more on racial, social, and economic considerations than on religion. The Baghdadis regarded their life-style and interests as closer to that of the British. Upon their arrival, they were not met with any pressure to assimilate, and this meant that they did not have to identify with the indigenous population, including the Bene Israel. Since they shared in the European culture and customs, they sought to be treated like Jews anywhere in the British Empire, not like Indians. The British, however, consistently refused to distinguish between Baghdadis and other Indian Jews for purposes of electoral rolls. Until 1885 Baghdadi Jews were classified by the government as “Europeans,” but they were disturbed when the British government thereafter declared them “non-



European.” The struggle to be considered European after 1885 constituted a main theme of the Baghdadis’ sojourn in India, particularly in Calcutta. The classifications of “European” and “non-European” had important ramifications in many areas, one of which was education, partly because education was subsidized by the government. It especially had implications for higher education. After 1885, the Baghdadis were no longer eligible for the state scholarships for Europeans domiciled in India to study in Europe

For all the years of their residence in India, the Baghdadis never saw the necessity to adopt an Indian language; they spoke Arabic and later English. This posed another barrier for the Bene Israel, whose mother tongue was Marathi. These differences in vernaculars—Arabic versus Marathi—prevented any intimacy between the two groups. However, some of the educated Bene Israel communicated in English with the Baghdadis. As English became more attractive and useful as a key to higher posts in government services, the importance of Marathi receded and some Bene Israel parents wanted to educate their children in the European and Baghdadi schools that used English as a medium of instruction. Several Bene Israel advocated maintaining Marathi, claiming that if the educated classes neglected the language, they would become totally alienated from the rest of the Bene Israel. They were also afraid that allowing Marathi to lapse would serve to enhance the isolation of the Bene Israel from their fellow Indians, in whose midst they had been living for centuries.

In the late-nineteenth century, the Baghdadis abandoned their Arab-style dress in favor of European fashion. Baghdadi women wore European dress, but acquired saris for special occasions. The Bene Israel, on the other hand, stressed their Indianness in their garb and names. They dressed in much the same way as did most other urban minorities. Unlike the Baghdadis who adopted English names, the Bene Israel used Hindu forms of their biblical names. Thus Benjamin became Benji and Moses, Musaji;<sup>22</sup> but they continued to use their biblical names for religious rites and ceremonies.

Despite their many differences, the two groups occasionally cooperated in matters related to religion, education, and employment. The Baghdadis often served as religious teachers for the Bene Israel. In the 1880s, special requests to the government regarding religious observances for those Bene Israel serving in the Indian Army required cooperation between the two communities. Later, in the 1920s, when university exams fell on Saturdays or Jewish holidays, the two groups joined together and succeeded in having the exam dates changed. They also worked together on matters of ritual. Thus, in 1939, permission was granted for the Jews of Bombay (in an otherwise abstemious society) to use wine on the Sabbath and holidays and for marriages and circumcisions. In 1943 a small supply of wheat was made available to the two communities to bake matzot, despite the wartime wheat rationing.

After 1927, the issue of Bene Israel participation in the Baghdadis’ synagogue services began to subside; Bene Israel were counted in the *minyan* and

allowed to take part in the Torah reading. It was a Baghdadi from Iraq who became the major benefactor of the Bene Israel school, the Israelite School in Bombay. Wealthy Baghdadis like Sir Elly Kadoorie and the Sassoons contributed to many Bene Israel educational institutions. Following their father's footsteps, the Sargon brothers, whose mother was a Baghdadi, were also staunch supporters of the Bene Israel.

Another point of interaction between the Baghdadis and the Bene Israel was the Sassoon mills, on which both depended for employment. It was assumed that any Baghdadi who dropped out of school could find employment there. The Bene Israel worked as hands in the mills; the Baghdadis, as office clerks or in accounting positions. The few Bene Israel clerks employed in the Sassoon mills seemed to have done better and risen faster than the Baghdadis, because they were more educated than the latter, who often dropped out of high school. Relations in the mills between the two groups were close professionally, but not personally. The closing of the mills in the middle of the 1940s ultimately put an end to these relationships and contributed to Jewish emigration.

During World War II, the need to mobilize funds and personnel for the war effort promoted unity between the two groups. Both the Baghdadi Jews and the Bene Israel joined in efforts to defend against Nazi propaganda. They also joined forces to facilitate the admission and sheltering of Jewish refugees from Eastern and Central Europe. The Sassoons, especially, attempted to use their influence to obtain naturalization for the Jewish refugees and to assist them. Another aspect of cooperation between the Baghdadis and the Bene Israel occurred in 1940, when representatives of both communities were instrumental in persuading the British authorities to allow the enrollment of Jews in the Indian Auxiliary Forces, despite the British demand that only Jews of European descent on the male side be accepted.

However, it appears that neither the employment of Bene Israel in the Baghdadi-owned factories nor the Baghdadi financial assistance to Bene Israel educational institutions and charity organizations could mitigate the Bene Israel resentment of the Baghdadis. The occasional cooperative ventures between the two groups were overshadowed by the stances that each adopted at the end of the nineteenth century and during the two World Wars, when the issue of "Indianness," Zionism, and electoral representation faced the Jewish community of India. These issues were less painful for the Baghdadis, whose certainties were clearer than those of the Bene Israel. Thus, the Bene Israel began to reexamine and redefine their identity as Indians in light of the rise of Indian nationalism and other developments in India and Palestine.

The loyalty of the Bene Israel to Great Britain seemed unquestionable, but at the same time they were trying to find a balance between their Indian and Jewish identities. Their assimilation into the Indian and Hindu cultures complicated the matter for them. Many of the Bene Israel felt that their lives and destinies were shaped during their domicile in India; they defined themselves

almost completely as Indians.<sup>23</sup> In the interwar years some thought that it was possible to identify with the Indians and yet not seek the British ouster. Although the sense of being Indians increasingly developed among the Bene Israel, the most educated among them, particularly government employees, felt that their interest lay with the British. Such questions did not affect the Baghdadis, who on the whole preferred business and jobs in the mills to government service. Although many Bene Israel felt that they were Indians first, then Jews, nevertheless they were not nationalists and were loyal to the British who ran the country. Thus, the process of identity formation was more complex for the Bene Israel, who had been part and parcel of the Indian environment for centuries, than for the Baghdadis, who adamantly resisted being considered Indians. The upsurge of Indian nationalism pushed the Baghdadis to embrace an ever-more pro-British stance, and their relationship with the Bene Israel became even more troubled.

At the same time as Indian nationalism was coming to the fore, Zionism was becoming an issue for the Jewish community. While the Bene Israel were too split to form a Zionist organization, a few enthusiastic Baghdadis in Bombay established the first Baghdadi Zionist Association (BZA), despite the indifference of the Baghdadi community as a whole. Most of the contributions for institutions in Palestine came from the middle-class Baghdadis rather than the wealthy members of the community. Sir Victor Sassoon and other Baghdadis abstained from stating their opinion on the partition of Palestine or on a national Jewish home there. Until 1930, the wealthy Baghdadis took minimal interest in participating and contributing to the Zionist efforts and they ignored earlier attacks on Zionism by the Indian Muslims, the Muslim League, and the Khalifat government, which were supported by Mahatma Ghandi. Ghandi was strongly opposed to the idea of the partition of India and applied the same judgment to the solution of the Palestine problem. For him, Indian Muslim fidelity remained the primary issue. His need to maintain Muslim support precluded him from publicly voicing any sympathy for Zionism. Nehru openly took a stand against Zionism and, indeed, the Hindu press and politicians appeared to regard the Jews in Palestine as Western intruders.

Although led by pro-British Baghdadis, the BZA and its organ, the *Jewish Bulletin*, supported the Balfour Declaration and opposed the British White Paper of 1930. This kind of support, however, was rare because the Indian Jews, and particularly the Bene Israel, were afraid to express their views openly lest it arouse anti-Semitism. The lack of a Zionist education and the infrequent visits by Zionist emissaries from Palestine hampered the development of effective Zionist activities among the Bene Israel. Although poor, they were still by far the largest section of Indian Jewry, and politically the most important. Only a few Bene Israel joined the BZA. At the end of World War II, with the prospect of an independent India, and possibly an independent Jewish state, the Jews of India, especially the Bene Israel, were forced to decide where their future lay.

Those Indian Jews, like the Baghdadis, who had reached the zenith of their economic prosperity and social status under the British rule, now found their position undermined, because of their association with the imperial power. Likewise, the outburst of nationalistic fervor soured prevailing attitudes toward the minority communities like the Bene Israel, who had not taken a clear stand on the issue of independence. Both the Baghdadis and the Bene Israel were ill-prepared for the greater economic competition that resulted from the “Indianization” of government services.

The Bene Israel became more concerned about their future when India was finally granted independence in 1947. They felt the repercussions of the British departure and feared that they would lose political and economic security and would suffer discrimination. Their main concern was government jobs, which were open to competition in the independent India. They seemed to shrink from competition and did not apply to take the exams for the prospective positions. With the departure of the British from India, the Bene Israel felt that they had lost their protectors. Nevertheless, given the fact that in many ways they felt secure in their identity as Indians citizens, and that they had fewer connections in the West than the Baghdadis, the Bene Israel might very well have adjusted to the new independent India had Israel not emerged at almost the same time. But their emigration to Israel during 1947-1950 was due more to the economic condition in India and the closing of the Sassoon mills in 1945 than to their attachment to Judaism or Zionism. Had the British not left India, the Bene Israel might not have emigrated to Israel, for they felt a deep devotion to India.

As for the Baghdadis, the policy of “Indianization” in independent India worked against them, as the Indian government issued regulations controlling the export of foreign exchange and restricting the import of non-essential commodities. With strong business ties with Britain and the Far East, and with family connections and funds abroad, the Baghdadi upper class soon emigrated to the Commonwealth countries and to the United States. The establishment of Israel proved too strong an attraction to resist for those who were unable to go elsewhere. It seemed that the Baghdadis were almost predestined to leave, as they doubted if they would be comfortable in the new India. Thus, the Baghdadis, who came to India mainly for trade purposes and were not interested in becoming Indians or taking to Indian customs, simply left when the British did.<sup>24</sup>

In the early 1950s, the Jewish community in India numbered 26,000.<sup>25</sup> Thirty years later, this figure dropped to about 6,000 (with about 250 Baghdadis remaining in Bombay and Calcutta). Except in a few instances, little was done to bring the remnants of the Baghdadis and the Bene Israel together. Indeed, in the independent India, with its drastically diminished Jewish population, the distinctions between the Bene Israel and the Baghdadis—their conflict now only a memory—barely mattered any more.<sup>26</sup>

## NOTES

1. The existence of any substantial white Jewish community in the Malabar Coast before the sixteenth century cannot be documented. The white Jews claim that the Indian ruler of the Malabar Coast gave their leader Joseph Rabban two copper plates engraved in ancient Tamil, detailing the land rights and privileges there. It seems that the black Cochin Jews came to the Malabar Coast earlier, converted the native slaves, and married them. The Cochin Jews arrived in Bombay as Jewish missionaries to the Bene Israel and were determined to promote a religious awakening and educational transformation among the Bene Israel. They served for the Bene Israel as teachers, preachers, and expounders of the Jewish Law. They initiated the translation of the basic Hebrew liturgy and the Passover Haggadah into the Marathi dialect. For a general introduction to the Jews of Cochin, see Walter J. Fischel's articles, "Cochin" in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1971, vol. 5, pp. 621-28, and "The Contribution of the Cochin Jews to South Indian and Jewish Civilization," *Commemoration Volume, Cochin Synagogue Quatercentenary Celebration* (Cochin, 1971), pp. 15-64; David G. Mandelbaum, "The Jewish Way of Life in Cochin," *Journal of Jewish Social Studies*, 1(1939), pp. 423-60; Schifra Strizower, "The Jews of Cochin," in *Exotic Jewish Communities* (London, 1962), pp. 88-124; S.S. Koder, *History of the Jews of Kerala* (Cochin, 1974). See also Thomas A Timberg, ed., "Social Stratification among the Jews of Cochin," in his *Jews in India* (New York, 1986), pp. 61-120.

2. Comprehensive works on the Bene Israel by Bene Israel authors include: Hayeem S. Kehimkar, *The History of the Bene Israel of India*, ed. by I. Olsvanger (Tel Aviv, 1937); Shellim Samuel, *Treatise on the Origin and Early History of the Beni-Israel of Maharashtra State* (Bombay, 1963); Moses Ezekiel, *History and Culture of the Bene Israel in India* (Bombay, 1948). Other valuable sources are the two studies by Benjamin J. Israel, *Religious Evolution Among the Bene Israel of India Since 1750* (Bombay, 1963) and *The Bene Israel of India* (New York, 1984). A recent ethnographic study is Schifra Strizower's work, *The Children of Israel: The Bene Israel of Bombay* (New York, 1971). See also Walter J. Fischel, "Bombay in Jewish History in the Light of New Documents from the Indian Archives," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* (hereafter, *PAAJR*), 38-39 (1972): 19-44 and S. Strizower, "The 'Bene Israel' in Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2(1966): 123-43.

3. About the origin of the Jews of Baghdad in India, see David S. Sassoon, *History of the Jews of Baghdad* (Letchworth, 1949), chap. 33; Fischel's article "The Immigration of 'Arabian Jews' to India in the Eighteenth Century," *PAAJR*, 33 (1965): 1-20. Several works were compiled by Baghdadi Jews on the Baghdadi community of Calcutta, among these: Ezekiel M. Musleah, *On the Banks of the Ganga: The Sojourn of Jews in Calcutta* (Mass, 1975); Isaac S. Abraham, *Origin and History of the Calcutta Jews* (Calcutta, 1969), dealing with Baghdadi customs and practices; and David Ezra's book, *Turning Back the Pages: A Chronicle of Calcutta Jewry* (London, 1986), dealing with Jewish population and genealogy.

4. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru played a notable role in getting the government of India to allow the Jewish refugees to practice their professions in India. More particularly, he persuaded a reluctant Indian Medical Council to recognize Continental medical qualification to enable Jewish refugee doctors to practice in India. About the status of these refugees, see Joan G. Roland, *Jews in British India* (Brandeis University, 1989), pp. 177-86, 207-208, and 234-35.

5. It was believed that the Indian castes existed in different degrees of spiritual dignity. Contact between those of high degree with those of lower degree produced pollution in those of high degree, hence the castes must be kept apart by the ban of intermarriage and the restrictions of commensalism. A low caste, however, was able to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by imitating the practice of the higher caste. See J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India* (London, 1951) and Schifra Strizower, "Jews as an Indian Caste," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 1(1959): 44, 47, and 48.

6. This legend, which was also current in one of the Hindu Puranas, may have been appropriated by the Bene Israel with some modifications to explain their presence on the west coast of India. See J.H. Lord, *The Jews in India and the Far East* (Kolhapur, 1907), pp. 40-45.; H. Kehimkar, *The History . . .*, pp. 6-12; *Gazette of the Bombay Presidency* (Bombay, 1885), vol. XVIII, part 1, p. 506. For more information about the various theories of the early history and origin of the Bene Israel see B.J. Israel, *Religious . . .*, p. 4; J. Roland, *Jews . . .*, pp. 11-15; and John Wilson, *Lands of the Bible* (Edinburgh, 1847), 2:667-79.

7. A comprehensive list of the Bene Israel soldiers and officers who excelled in the military service is provided in H. Kehimkar's *The History . . .*, pp. 187-225; B.J. Israel, *The Bene Israel . . .*

pp.17-19; W. Fischel, "Bombay" . . . , pp. 126-27; and J. Roland, *Jews* . . . , pp. 21-24.

8. The Bene Israel themselves referred to themselves and were referred to as a Jewish caste; see Strizower, *Exotic* . . . , p. 66. When and why the term "Bene Israel" came to be applied exclusively to this community is a matter of controversy. It appears that the Bene Israel employed it for themselves persistently only after having established themselves as a distinct ethnic and linguistic entity in the late-nineteenth century. Most Bene Israel authors advanced the view that their forefathers adopted the Koranic appellation *Benu Isra'il* as a deliberate protest against the use of the term *yahudi* (Jew), used pejoratively by Muslims; see H. G. Reissner, "The Ummi Prophet and the Banu Isra'il of the Quran," in *Muslim World* (Hartford, 1949), H. Kehimkar, *The History* . . . , pp. 74-75, and Fischel "Bombay" . . . , pp. 127-31.

9. It is possible to discern three major stages in the development of the Baghdadi settlement in Bombay. The first was due to the Basra-Bombay trade. Basra, the great port on the Persian Gulf, was an important port of the English East Indian Company from 1760 on. The central figure in the economic arena of Basra was Jacob Aaron Gabbai, a known banker and the president of the Jewish community in that city. The second stage was connected with Surat. Among the "Arabian Jews" who, at that juncture, moved to Bombay were Jacob Nissim Semah, Ezekiel Abdul Nubee, Isaac David, and Solomon Jacob. The latter played a leading role in the economic and communal affairs of the Jewish community. He was considered the first Arabian Jew who established himself in Bombay. The third phase in the growth and development of the Arabian colony was initiated by David S. Sassoon of Baghdad. For more details, see Fischel, "The Immigration . . .", pp.1-20 and Thomas A. Timberg, "Baghdadi Jews in Indian Port Cities, in his *Jews* . . . , pp. 273-82.

10. Surat, the capital of the province of Gujarat on the west coast of India became, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a major trading city, and maintained its economic importance all through the eighteenth century. Because of its economic prosperity, many merchants from Europe and the Middle East flocked there. There was a large colony of Jewish merchants that established a synagogue and a cemetery in the city. For details about the leading Arabia Jews in Surat, see Fischel, "The Immigration" . . . , pp. 6-10.

11. The influx of Persian-speaking Jews to Bombay came particularly from Meshed. They were mostly Marranos; prominent among them was Mulla Ibrahim Nathan (1816-1868) who, with his brother Musa, played an important role in the first Anglo-Afghan war. He provided the British officers with intelligence information and assisted British prisoners following the defeat of the British army in Kabul in 1842. In Bombay he married a relative of the Sassoon family and established a successful business in textiles. His commercial success encouraged Jews from Meshed, Afghanistan, and Bukhara to come to Bombay.

12. For an estimate of the numbers Jews in India, see H.G. Reissner, "Indian-Jewish Statistics 1837-1941," *Jewish Social Studies* 12 (1950): 349-66, and Benjamin J. Israel, "Note on the Bene Israel Population," in *Religious* . . . , pp. 21-22. It is safe to assume that the Indian Jews suffered very little losses of numbers from emigration, conversions to Christianity, or intermarriage.

13. David Sassoon was an observant Orthodox Jew whose business stopped daily at the appropriate times for prayer. His house was a meeting place for studying and chanting traditional hymns. Out of these meetings emerged the nucleus of a new organization of Baghdadi Jews in Bombay. To accommodate the new arrivals from Iraq, Sassoon arranged food, housing, and medical care for them. Several of his offspring were knighted by Queen Victoria. In the 1930s, E.D. Sassoon and Company had the largest textile operation in India and produced more cloth than any other group of mills in the country. The Sassoon mills paid higher wages and provided night schools, libraries, reading rooms, sports clubs, and even on-the-job day-care centers. See Cecil Roth, *The Sassoon Dynasty* (London, 1941) and Stanley Jackson, *The Sassoons* (New York, 1968).

14. The petition was signed in English and in Hebrew by Haskel Abdul Nubee, Murad Gubbay, Aaron Murad, Aaron Candi, David Sassoon, Mussa Azran, Isaac Dawud, Elijah Hayem, Elijah Moshe, and Nasub Solomon.

15. Cited in S. Strizower, *The Children* . . . , p. 45.

16. See M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of Southern India* (Oxford, 1952), p. 30.

17. See J. Roland, *Jews* . . . , p. 75 and I. J. Samson, "Marriage and Divorce among the Bene Israel," *Israelite*, 1 (August, 1917), pp.150-52.

18. A similar case occurred in 1935 in Rangoon, Burma, where some sixty Bene Israel lived. The trustees of the only synagogue there refused to list the Bene Israel among those eligible for election to the board of trustees, because the Bene Israel did not observe the Jewish laws of *halitza*, *yibbum*, and



divorce. This case required the intervention of the government in favor of the Bene Israel. About the case, see J. Roland, *Jews . . .*, pp. 138-42.

19. The *malida* ceremony entailed food-offering and recitations of prayers for special occasions. It was a common practice among the Hindus and the Muslims in India. The ceremony was judaized by singing hymns for the Prophet Elijah as the harbinger of the Messiah. See J. Lord, *The Jews . . .*, pp. 26-27; B.J. Israel, *The Bene Israel . . .*, p.24.

20. For a full description of the Bene Israel customs and practices borrowed from the Hindus and Muslims, see J. Lord, *The Jews . . .*, pp. 19-40.

21. About the missionaries activities, see Shirley Isenbarg, "Paradoxical Outcome of the Meeting of Bene Israel and Christian Missionaries in Nineteenth-century India," in T. Timberg's *Jews . . .*, pp. 348-60. According to the Bene Israel tradition, the first religious revival was brought to them from Egypt by a Jew, David Rahabi, some "thousand years ago." It is evident that the Bene Israel tradition mistakenly attributed an event that happened in the eighteenth century to the distant past; see, Kehimkar, *The Story . . .*, pp. 66-67; S. Strizower, *The Children . . .* pp. 35-36.

22. Shalva Weil, "Names and Identity among the Bene Israel," *Ethnic Groups*, vol. I (London, 1977), pp. 201-219, and B.J. Israel, *The Bene Israel . . .*, pp. 120-66.

23. J. Roland, *Jews . . .*, pp. 52-54. Although most of the Bene Israel kept aloof from the Indian national movement, some took part in it, like Dr. Solomon Moses, who strongly identified with Indians. In 1925 he advocated that the Bene Israel participate as Indians in the progress and development of India and that the needs of the country should be those of the community. In 1927 the lawyer I. J. Samson organized a successful Indian protest by stopping all the activities in the Court of Small Causes. He was joined by the two brothers, David and Abraham Erulkar, who threw themselves into the home-rule movement and supported the non-cooperation movement. The Samsons and the Erulkars were highly placed professionals with Indian clients, and as such they had little to lose and could afford to express their nationalistic views. Soon they became disillusioned with Ghandi's methods of non-cooperation and became involved in social work. The Baghdadis were not active in politics either. However, a few participated in municipal elections from 1882 on. In Bombay, for example, Baghdadi Jews (and the Bene Israel) served as honorary magistrates and were offered many public appointments.

24. The Jews were not the only minority that left independent India. Many Muslims felt insecure too and departed for Pakistan; the Anglo-Indians emigrated to England, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia.

25. J. Roland, *Jews . . .*, p. 329, n. 58.

26. About the situation of the Jewish communities in India in the late 1970s, see Joan Roland's article, "The Jews of India: Communal Survival or the end of a Sojourn?," *Jewish Social Studies*, 42 (1980): 76-90.

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# *Jacob and Esau and the Emergence of the Jewish People*

**DANIEL J. ELAZAR**

LIFE IS FULL OF HARD CHOICES BETWEEN LESS THAN perfect alternatives. According to the Bible, even God is faced with such choices. It is part of the greatness of the Bible that it poses the problem that God, as well as humans, faces in choosing between less than perfect alternatives, even in connection with those whom it presents unequivocally as God's special people. The Bible does so even at the risk of exposing the ancient Israelites and hence the Jewish people to unjust criticism, based upon showing them, as Oliver Cromwell once said to his portrait painter, "warts and all." That may be a situation less than pleasant for Jews to face, and indeed in previous generations as well as the present there were those Jews who either ignored those critical parts or reinterpreted them to show that the Jewish forefathers were always God-fearing models of what the Almighty expected. In this respect the Bible is far more honest than some of its interpreters.

Frequently, the Bible presents characters whose personalities and roles confront those of other characters in order to make its point. This part of the biblical message reaches its apogee in the parallel cases of Joseph and Moses, who are presented as binary opposites. Joseph, because of his assimilation into Egypt and his unrestrained service to the pharaoh in subordinating the Egyptians and bringing his brother Israelites down to Egypt, is not counted among the patriarchs and indeed represents the end of the patriarchal line; while Moses, who represents the new leadership that inherits the mantle of the patriarchs, liberates his people not only from Egypt but, insofar as possible, from Egyptian culture, after starting at the very heart of that culture in the pharaoh's palace and family.

Here we examine a different confrontation, not so stark as that between Joseph and Moses but more direct, between Jacob and Esau, two brothers, the sons of Isaac and the grandsons of Abraham, at least one of whom is destined to carry on the patriarchal tradition. They ultimately give birth to the Jewish people as a covenanted people, invested with the task of doing God's will through their polity and society.

The story of the two brothers, Jacob and Esau, is a classic example of that dilemma and how God faces it in determining who shall carry on the Abrahamic line that will serve His purposes in the development of a societal model for the

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DANIEL J. ELAZAR, *president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, teaches political science at Temple University in Philadelphia and Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv. He is the author of numerous books on American and world Jewries.*

world. Jacob and Esau share both good and bad traits upon which to try to build leadership for the future. God is faced with having to choose between two combinations of traits and to select what would be better for leadership of his people. The Bible leaves us with the problem of trying to understand the choice between two flawed individuals and what that means for us, the readers and students of the Bible in every generation.

Neither portrait is all that flattering and it is too easy to move quickly from them to negative assessments of the individuals portrayed without fully understanding their complexities as individuals. We must remember that the Bible starts from the assumption that all human beings are flawed in one way or another by the very nature of things, and that its purpose is not to demonstrate the flawed character of individuals but to suggest some lessons about the problems by choosing among human weaknesses by focusing on human strengths, to be prudent in our choices yet to maintain our moral vision.

### Natural versus Federal Man

Esau and Jacob are introduced as struggling (*vayitrotzetzu*) with each other from the womb (Gen. 25:22). The homiletic treatment of this has been extensive, considering the way each has come to symbolize conflicting dimensions of power and authority. The common element uniting both is their tremendous energy which must be directed and harnessed. Jacob is to become Israel (literally: one who struggles with God), whose energy is to be directed by the covenant with God, while Esau will struggle with men and animals (nature) to become, in the eyes of the Midrash, the exemplar of a non-Jewish imperial ruler.

The future of the two struggling fetuses is foretold by God and is stated in ethno-political terms. The fathers of the two nations—*goyim* and *le'umim* are the terms used—are struggling. Jacob emerges as he is to live the first half of his life, struggling for personal advantage, as *Ya'akov*, one who grasps at the heel of his brother, trying to get out first.

The twins grow up as very different people. The description of Esau as a hunter and man of the field fits with the description of his appearance at birth, but that of Jacob as a quiet man, dwelling in tents, contradicts the first description of him. Given what follows immediately, one senses an irony in this description, although it may indicate the other dimension of Jacob's personality, which also stays with him, namely, the desire for a calm existence that remains his strong arm through all his struggles.

In the second recorded confrontation between the two, Jacob takes advantage of Esau's weakness, namely, an unthinking impulsiveness, to press his advantage in a most unbrotherly way, first acquiring Esau's *bekhorah* (birthright) for a bowl of lentils and then his father's blessing. The birthright has to do with inheritance of goods and position both. The tale is typically biblical.

The “bottom line” is that by his actions, Esau demonstrates that he does not deserve to be the one who continues Abraham’s responsibilities and rewards under God’s covenant, since he does not have the steady, thoughtful qualities which are required. Rather than getting his own food—after all, he was not really starving to death and Jacob was not the only kitchen in the encampment—he responds impulsively to a good smell and, in the words of Gen. 25:34, “despises his birthright.”

Jacob shows his wiliness as well as his greater intelligence and forethought. Jacob’s eye is always on the main chance; he sees his advantage and takes it, perhaps not believing the foolishness of his despised—and despising—rival. What he does is not quite honorable, though not illegal. The title he gains is at least partially valid, although he is insecure enough about it to conspire later with his mother to deceive his father so as to gain the blessing for the first-born as well (Gen. 27). In short, he is what nineteenth-century Americans would call “sharp,” a characteristic associated with the products of covenantal cultures—the term was invented to describe the New England Yankee descendants of the Puritans—ever since.

Much later, Esau marries two wives, both Hittite women, that is, locals, in violation of Abraham’s (and God’s) injunction not to take wives from among the Canaanite population. Again, one gets the sense of a headstrong person who acts impulsively, without sufficient thought (Gen. 26:34-35). His marriage is described as a vexation to both Rebekah and Isaac. Even his father, who has strong affection for him, is hurt by his act. This action alone forever rules out Esau as the bearer of patriarchal continuity. Esau could have overcome the sale of his birthright; as we see in the next chapter, Isaac was still prepared to give him the blessing due the firstborn. But acquiring foreign wives meant the detachment of his children from the Abrahamic line. Learning that he has been deceived, Isaac reaffirms the blessing that he gave to Jacob (Gen. 27:33).

Both the personal and psychological and the public and national dimensions of the rivalry between the two brothers are noteworthy. Despite the dreadful deception on the part of Jacob and his mother to gain Isaac’s patriarchal blessing, Jacob’s vocation as Isaac’s legitimate heir in the continued founding of the Jewish people is reaffirmed. In essence, the Bible tells us that a bright, calculating person who, at times, is less than honest, is preferable as a founder over a bluff, impulsive one who cannot make discriminating choices. Jacob continues to display characteristics which are later to become part of the non-Jewish stereotype of Jews (although they are only prominent, not typical—witness the very different characters of Abraham and Isaac), while Esau continues to display characteristics which are later to become part of the Jewish stereotype of non-Jews (“goyim”).

The public and national purposes of this story are, by now, self-evident—that the Esaus of the world, however attractive they may be in some ways, cannot assume the mantle of Abraham because of their personal deficiencies—

and are brought to our attention. At the very least, the Jacobs are the lesser evil because they can be chastened, educated, and redirected. In subsequent chapters God is to test and temper Jacob to turn his intelligence and cunning to moral ends.

In essence, what we have here is the climax of a struggle between natural man (Esau) and covenantal (or, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century terminology, federal) man (Jacob). Both are presented realistically—"warts and all"—in the Bible's way. Thus, it is not a confrontation between good and evil, but a choice between two limited and flawed human beings. Esau has the good and bad qualities of natural man—principal among them, generosity and impulsiveness, the characteristics of natural liberty. Jacob's character is at least equally mixed, joining intelligence with guile. Isaac, passive and insecure, is easily drawn to Esau, but God chooses Jacob since He can bind him by covenant and hopes to restrain his sharpness through the constraints of federal liberty—liberty in accordance with the terms of the covenant—while natural man simply cannot be restrained except by force.

Once again, God's choices are limited by the realities of human frailty. He makes the best choice that He can but we need not exaggerate the goodness of one or the badness of the other.

### **Covenant or Contract?**

After Jacob steals his father's blessing and enrages Esau, Isaac responds to Rebekah's request by sending off Jacob with a second blessing, actually commanding him not to take a Canaanite wife and to go to the family hearth for one instead (Gen. 27). The Bible conveys the sense of Isaac as a not-very-strong person, much influenced by his wife, attempting to play a role of strength by issuing commands (Gen. 27:1—*vayetzavehu*), something which even God does not ordinarily do. The reader knows how absurd it is for him to be commanding Jacob to do what Rebekah set him up to do in the first place to save Jacob's life.

Isaac transmits Abraham's promise to Jacob for the first time. His blessing includes both personal fertility and national promise. Up to this point, whatever legitimation Jacob has obtained has been obtained by deceit. Here, for the first time, he obtains a blessing more or less on his own. Whatever the source of the suggestion and the reasons behind it, Isaac knows it is a valid one. Perhaps it also brings with it recognition that, with Esau's marriage to a Hittite woman, only Jacob can be the bearer of the *berakhah*. Isaac gives it fully.

Shocked by his father blessing Jacob, Esau suddenly realizes what his Canaanite wife has meant to Isaac. He makes one last attempt to remedy the situation by also marrying a first cousin, the daughter of Ishmael. The effort to parallel Jacob is both clear and insufficient. Ishmael's is not the favored side of the family.

### Jacob Encounters God

Jacob leaves home to avoid Esau's wrath, and his transformation into a man suitable to carry on God's enterprise begins (Gen. 28). While Esau is left trying desperately to please his father, Jacob confronts God for the first time on the road, at Beth El. God proffers His covenant to Jacob, who, lacking more than sharpness, immediately turns it into a contractual arrangement. The careful reader cannot fail to perceive that a new dimension needs to be developed by the clever, often devious, younger brother. He has begun his testing.

Jacob's first encounter with God (Gen. 28:10-22) in a divinely-inspired vision is perfectly appropriate: a ladder set up on the earth and reaching to heaven. No one is more of this world than devious, scheming, jealous, ambitious Jacob who is here called to raise himself heavenward. God could hardly appear to him directly; first He had to get his attention. Hence, the device of the ladder and the heavenly beings going up and down, bringing Jacob's gaze and thoughts toward heaven.

God then becomes very personal in His guarantees and promises to Jacob, knowing His customer, as it were. God's revelation to Jacob is a reaffirmation of the promise to Abraham in even more practical and earthy terms—suitably attractive to Jacob, given his character. The promises of territory and kith are repeated, along with the statement that all the people of the earth will be blessed, that is, legitimized through Jacob's descendants.

Jacob's response is equally in character. He is awed by God's presence but still tries to make a deal with Him by vowing that if God keeps His promise in four specifically personal ways (protection on his way, food, clothing, and a safe return home), he will acknowledge Him and even reward Him by tithing—to "sweeten the pot" for God, as it were—a sure sign of Jacob's contractual approach to the matter. Jacob understands that God is not Esau, to be taken advantage of in a bargain; nor is He Isaac, to be deceived. God is a real power, hence the deal should be a good one for Him. God does not respond to all of this. What is most notable at the end of the chapter is God's silence.

The foregoing chain of events is not a covenant and is not described as such, but it clearly is presented as having all the elements of a pact. It is, indeed, a reaffirmation of the covenant with Abraham on God's part, which is turned into a kind of contractual arrangement by Jacob. Jacob is not morally ready for a covenantal relationship. His transformation may have begun, but it has just begun. God offers him a great promise for the future, and Jacob concentrates on the details of his present well-being. (Notice that he makes no reference whatsoever to the covenantal future in his vow.) Significantly, God, understanding Jacob, offers both possibilities. He needs Jacob to continue the unfolding of His plan, hence must educate him and bring him along.

The whole incident teaches us about the similarities and differences between covenant and contract, how they can be confused with one another be-



cause of their common emphasis on the freedom and integrity of the partners, their roots in negotiation, and the resultant mutual obligation, yet how they differ in their scope, in the basis of the obligation incurred, and, perhaps most important, in the spirit which surrounds and informs them. This relationship between the two species of pact is an enduring one, encountered in every situation where one or the other is used. There is place for both in our imperfect world, not only by using a contractual relationship as a way station toward a covenantal one, but also for each in its own place and situation; but, as much as their relationship to one another should be understood, they should not be confused.

### **Jacob Meets His Match**

Jacob goes on to meet a greater artist at deception than he—his uncle Laban (Gen. 29). First, he is deceived in his marriages, thereby acquiring two wives, Leah and Rachel, and their handmaidens, who are to mother the tribes of Israel, and in his work relationships. Jacob's hatred for Leah is not explained. One is led to deduce that her very presence is a constant reminder to Jacob of how he, the deceiver, was deceived in turn, forced into an unwanted marriage and seven years' additional free service to his uncle, in order to claim his beloved Rachel. Given what we know about Jacob's concern for his personal well-being, this was a deception that hurt greatly. Hence there is nothing that Leah can do to win her husband's love.

Here we have another example of Jacob's callousness toward other human beings. Leah is caught in a tragic web no less than Esau, and Jacob, while not the weaver of either, is very much involved in heightening the pain of their respective tragedies. In the end, each is somewhat compensated by God; Esau becomes wealthy and powerful in his own right (Gen. 36), Leah (and her concubine) provide most of Jacob's sons, and Jacob loses Rachel (Gen. 35), lives for years in the belief that Joseph, his favorite son, born of Rachel, is dead (Gen. 37), and finally is forced to end his days in Egypt (Gen. 46). It is through Jacob's tempering by life that he is transformed to become Israel.

After twenty years, Jacob and Laban reach the parting of ways—not without bitterness, fear, and further deception, causing God to intervene to protect Jacob and his household. The end result is a covenant between the two men, defining their future relationship by separating them one from the other. Up to this point, covenants have only been used to bind; here we learn that they can be used to separate as well. There are certain relationships that are best preserved from a distance, and this is certainly one of them. In a sense, the covenant is a sign of the good sense of the two principals who are both crafty and prudent.

**Jacob Becomes Israel**

Jacob moves out of one dangerous situation toward another, both with members of his family—Laban and Esau—and, on the way, decisively confronts God (Gen. 32). Through that very mysterious confrontation, crafty, self-centered Jacob becomes one who strives or wrestles with God (*Yisra'el*), thereby establishing his destiny and that of his heirs forever. This destiny is to be embodied in the name of the people who inherit him. A new relationship is thereby established, one of striving with God.

There are those who, like Abraham, hearken to God, and those, like Isaac, who passively accept God's dictates. Jacob has none of the characteristics appropriate for either role; witness how he has tried to contract with God for protection. But he can be brought to at least strive with God, wrestle with Him in the spirit of his heritage. Thus, Jacob's wrestling with God completes the patriarchal cycle of relationships with the Almighty, from Abraham's powerful and dignified service to Isaac's submissiveness to Jacob's ambivalence. Earlier covenant negotiations give way to wrestling and bargaining for a blessing.

The story is constructed as follows: Jacob completes his arrangement with Laban only to learn of Esau's approach with a large body of men at his side, frightening Jacob, who takes steps to save as much of his people and property as he can if there is trouble, without resorting to force of arms. Jacob has no military resources at his disposal, so he can only maneuver—another paradigm of the Jewish condition throughout much of Jewish history.

He then turns to God in a very carefully phrased prayer (as we would expect—his every move and word reflects forethought), which:

- a) invokes his fathers (Gen. 32:10);
- b) reminds God that he is returning to his land and kith at God's request (Gen. 32:10);
- c) emphasizes his unworthiness, certainly true in this case (Gen. 32:11);
- d) indicates that he had taken what steps he could to protect his camp (Gen. 32:11);
- e) asks God to save him, and especially his sons (Gen. 32:12), from Esau because of His Promise to multiply Jacob's descendants (Gen. 32:13).

Every element is appropriate in a petition which is, at the same time, the opening of a negotiation. Jacob describes God's response to His servants, the patriarchs, as *hasadim* or loving expressions of covenant obligation, and *'emet* or true manifestations of covenant loyalty.

The third element in Jacob's preparations is the assembly of gifts for Esau on a grand scale and the arrangement for their presentation in the most effective way, prior to their meeting and in waves, to soften him up for the actual encounter. What we have before us is vintage Jacob in a defensive posture—prudent, crafty, careful, covering all his bets. He divides his camp so that at least half of his wealth is likely to be preserved, he asks God's help in a

carefully constructed prayer, he not only arranges to present Esau with abundant gifts but takes care to arrange the manner of their delivery, and then he secretly transfers his immediate family to safety, just in case.

Finally alone by his own doing, Jacob is now open to the climax of his life, the encounter with the mysterious stranger who speaks in the name of God. In the wrestling that follows, Jacob displays two of his strongest characteristics—tenacity and the ability to make it pay. Jacob wrestles the stranger to the point where he can ask for a blessing.

As his blessing, Jacob's name is changed, to *Yisra'el*. Unlike the firm faith of Abraham and the accepting faith of Isaac, Jacob wrestles with God all his life, doing His will only after that wrestling. This becomes his people's destiny until the end of days. Thus, it is the unique destiny of the Jews—Israel—to wrestle with God as well as be witness to His covenant. Israel's future is not one of blind faith and obedience to God's will but one of difficult covenant partnership, of wrestling with their own inclinations and doubts in the face of a mystery which will not fully reveal itself. Covenants do not necessarily end strife; they contain it within a framework or, better, within certain bonds. In that sense, the imagery of the conflict between Jacob and the stranger is paradigmatic. The Jews are still holding the mystery in their arms and will not let go without a blessing, while it grasps the hollow of their thighs.

Jacob perceives what has happened to him—that he has seen the face of God and that his destiny is now changed. At the same time, he has acquired a permanent limp because of his wounded thigh. One does not emerge from such a conflict without some scar.

Jacob, now Israel, is ready for his confrontation with Esau—prudently prepared by his own agency and properly chastised yet blessed by divine agency. The confrontation continues the saga of the complex relationship between the two brothers, and sharpens the biblical description of natural versus federal man. Esau remains as open and impulsive as Jacob is prudent and crafty. Jacob determines to make peace between them but to keep their relationship at arm's length. After his three confrontations, Jacob reaches Canaan and begins to settle into a new set of tribulations.

# *Why the Jewish People Should Welcome Converts*

LAWRENCE J. EPSTEIN

CONVERSION TO JUDAISM HAS RECENTLY BECOME A prominent subject of discussion among American Jews, primarily because it has been held out as a perceived antidote to intermarriage. Whatever efficacy conversion may or may not have in reducing the number of intermarriages, the linking of the two subjects distorts conversion's crucial role in Jewish theology, its centrality at important eras in Jewish history, and its promise as a component of Jewish renewal.

Conversion's importance to Judaism will come as a surprise to many Jews; their reluctance to welcome others to their faith is so embedded in their conception of Judaism that it has become part of the faith itself.

Part of the problem is definitional. "Welcoming" is used here to mean openly proclaiming the willingness of the Jewish people to accept sincere converts, accepting them as genuine and authentic Jews when they do convert, and integrating them fully into the community after the conversion. "Welcoming" excludes using any physical or emotional pressure, deceit, bribery, or intrusive behavior to gain converts. It excludes belittling the faith of others or promising eternal reward for converting or eternal damnation for not converting. "Welcoming," that is, specifically excludes the tactics used by some non-Jewish missionaries. It also excludes an understanding of Judaism which refuses to offer Judaism to interested Gentiles, which creates so many obstacles to conversion that the obstacles become tantamount to a refusal to accept converts, or which does not accept converts as fully Jewish.

The question of why so central a Jewish enterprise as welcoming converts became peripheral and then antithetical to what was defined as mainstream Judaism, requires a recapitulation of conversion's fate within Jewish thought and history. Such a recapitulation provides the background for an explanation of the Jewish reluctance to welcome converts, a reluctance which has had and continues to have a profoundly negative effect on the fate of Judaism and the Jewish people.

It is notoriously awkward to talk of Judaism as a specific religious worldview. Especially prior to rabbinic Judaism and after the Enlightenment,

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LAWRENCE J. EPSTEIN is a Professor of English at Suffolk Community College, where he also teaches a course on Jewish thought. He is the author of *Conversion to Judaism: A Guidebook*.

Judaism contained multiple, sometimes contradictory, intellectual strands which, even when intertwined, retained some of their distinctiveness. Additionally, ideas in Judaism proceed text by text, whereas in reconstructing those ideas to make a unified thesis, the ideas are ripped from different texts at different times. Such a process can easily result in doing violence to the idea and the texts.

Despite these and other difficulties in interpreting Jewish thought, it is still possible to discern, broadly, Judaism's central views about conversion to Judaism.

It is first important to chart the location of conversionary activity in the logical geography of Jewish thought.

The foundational ideas of Judaism are a belief in one God, the idea that God made an incursion into human history to offer a revelation, the Torah, and that the ethical and ritual instructions in that revelation, the *mitzvot*, are the divine commandments which define a good life. The theological structure built on such a foundation rests on these beliefs. The revolutionary notion of monotheism, for example, led to the view that God was not just a God of the Israelites but of all the cosmos, and therefore of all people. After all, the Torah begins with creation, not revelation; the first human created was not Jewish. Such a God was concerned with the morality of all people. Any divine plans for humanity rested on the notion that humans were part of a unified family, and the spiritual message that God wanted to give was not to be limited to just some people but was available and meant for all.

The Jews were elected by God, who revealed to the Jewish people a universal moral instruction that was meant for all humanity, not just the Jews; Jews were to be the messengers, bringing such instructions to all. At first, it seems strange that a universal revelation should be given to a small, powerless people in the middle of a desert after an escape from slavery. Of course, it is this very strangeness that helps identify the reasons for such a divine choice. Human freedom requires the ability to choose disbelief. Had God chosen to give a revelation obvious and available to all people, the human choice would have been restricted; humans would have had to accept God's moral precepts. Had the message been given to a powerful people, the freedom to accept or reject such a message would also have been restricted, because it would have been difficult to separate the message from the power of the messengers. However, when the message was given to a landless group of ex-slaves to transmit, the message would have to be considered entirely on its own, and humans would be free to accept or reject it only on its merits. A desert is the perfect spot for a universal divine revelation because the desert belongs to no nation (as the *Mekhilta* on Exodus 19:2 makes clear), and so none can claim exclusivity over the revelation. The notion of giving the message to the newly-liberated constructed a powerful psychological and social tie between attachment to God's message and the significance of freedom—both in the notions of free choice

and political and economic freedom.

It was at Mount Sinai that God made a covenant with the Jewish people. The Jews accepted the revelation from God, with its divine commission to present that revelation to the world. God, in turn, would make the Jews “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). The idea of a “kingdom of priests” has been interpreted in many ways. Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno argued that the passage meant the Jews had a religious vocation to bring the revelation to all humanity. This interpretation was adopted by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Reform thinkers, from Abraham Geiger onward. Geiger, for example, in his book *Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben* 2, read the passage to see the Jews as universal priests. Most talmudic rabbis, however, did not see the phrase as having universal implications.

The phrase, then, resonates with particularistic and universalistic strains, as does Judaism as a whole. The covenant given by God was a mixture of the two. The universalistic elements provided the core religious content of the message the Jewish people was to convey to humanity. The danger of focusing solely on the universalistic strains lay in ignoring the specific contributions the particularistic played in performing the universal mission, such as by separating Jewish beliefs, morality, and way of life from a more generalized universal set of such beliefs, morality, and way of life.

The particularistic elements also played a vital role. They existed to prevent Jews from sacrificing their religion in the name of any other religion or some supra-religion and as a fence around the sacred teachings which were to be transmitted; the particularities were to force Jews to be a separate people so as not to let their Godly message be overwhelmed by the stronger cultures which surrounded them. The danger of focusing solely on the particularistic strains lay in interpreting Jewish chosenness to imply some sense of superiority rather than what it did imply: chosenness to perform a mission to all.

Additionally, the particularities were healthy in preventing the Jewish people from developing a sense of religious superiority because they had been the people to receive the divine message. Such a separation also limits the nature of delivering the message. A people apart could not force their religion upon others. A people apart cannot be religious imperialists. The ethical implication here is clear: while the Jewish mission was to bring God’s universal message to all humanity, Jews could only offer the message; they could not mandate its acceptance. The Jews were to be a “light unto the nations.” They could offer Judaism and welcome those who accepted the message, people who chose to become chosen, people who became Jewish. Such people, coming to Judaism freely, without fear for their salvation, were to be embraced.

The separation has another important implication, one explicitly noted in Jewish literature: salvation is universal; it is dependent on moral behavior, not on accepting Judaism. The righteous of all faiths have an equal chance to be saved. Judaism was not triumphalist; it called for worship of God, not for



the disappearance of Gentiles or non-Jewish religions. Judaism's vision is not that of every person becoming Jewish. Conversion is to be available, but not mandated. It is to be offered, but not forced. Of course, such a view, while undermining the potential for conversionary activism, was valuable in defining the boundaries of the Jewish mission.

Such a mission involved both the Jewish people scrupulously obeying the covenant themselves so as to be a moral model, again emphasizing the particular, and conveying the revelation to all humanity, emphasizing the universal.

Jews were to be active witnesses on behalf of their faith. The basis for such activity was derived from a variety of sources. God's divine revelation itself, of course, was an active act of offering Judaism, of God sharing a faith.

Jews also saw missionary impulses in the actions of their founders; Abraham's journey from Haran to Canaan with "souls" whom he had acquired was understood by the rabbis to mean that Abraham had made converts. In *Sifre Deuteronomy*, 313 (on Deuteronomy 32:10), Abraham is described as so successful a missionary that God became known as King of the earth as well as of heaven. In *Genesis Rabbah* 39:21 Abraham is considered a missionary. In *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, 23a, Jews are urged to bring people "beneath the wings of the Divine Presence" exactly as Abraham had done. The word "convert" is used loosely when referring to Abraham's efforts. Abraham invited non-Israelites to join the Israelites; the formal notion of religious conversion did not emerge for some time. Many other examples of missionary efforts by the founders of Judaism can be found in aggadic literature, such as in *Midrash Ha-Gadol*, 397. For example, Rabbi Hoshaya believed that Isaac sought converts; Jacob is considered to have done the same (see *Genesis Rabbah* 84:4). Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman believed that Joseph would not distribute food to the Egyptians unless they became circumcised (see *Genesis Rabbah* 90:6 and 91:5). Moses expounded the Torah in seventy languages, according to one midrash, because the Torah was meant to be heard and embraced by all humans. Several sources, such as *Exodus Rabbah* 1:29, note that prior to slaying the Egyptian taskmaster, Moses foresaw that there would not be a single convert from the among the taskmaster's posterity; it was this perception that justified the death.

The positive attitude toward seeking converts by the rabbinic sources provided another justification for offering Judaism. The favorable rabbinic attitude toward welcoming converts was based on attitudes developed in the Torah and by the prophets. The Torah includes numerous injunctions to the Jewish people to welcome strangers. The prophetic vision of the universal rule of God and of instruction coming from Zion was stated most eloquently in Second Isaiah (e.g. 42:6-7).

The most famous talmudic passage (*Pesahim* 87b) specifically praising conversionary work is by the prominent Rabbi Johanan, and agreed with by Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedat, in which it is asserted that God exiled Jews from their homeland for only one reason, to increase the number of converts. It is a par-

ticularly striking notion that so traumatic an event as national exile should be seen as having a divine use. The use had to have been considered so valuable that it justified such an exile from the promised land.

The imperative for mission was also seen in the actual historical efforts to welcome converts. Such efforts included: (1) creating literature such as the *Sibylline Oracles*, Josephus' *Contra Apionem*, Philo's *Apologia hyper Ioudaion*, the *Letter of Aristeeas*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, and much else that was sometimes used for missionary purposes; (2) opening synagogues for interested invited guests and visitors. There is a reference in Philo (*De Septenario*, 6) to "thousands of houses of instruction in all the towns," a reference probably to the many synagogues which served as learning centers for Gentiles; (3) personally approaching potential converts, such as the traveler Eleazar (mentioned in Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.43), who was active in Adiabene, a small kingdom on the Tigris River in which the Crown Prince, Izates, and the Queen Mother, and perhaps many others, were converted; (4) assimilating Gentiles who lived among the Jewish people, including, according to Philo, many children abandoned by their Gentile families; and (5) through marriage of a Jew to a Gentile. Such efforts were deliberately not intrusive. They did not characteristically include belittling the beliefs of others, or the creation of a widespread exclusively missionary occupation.

The Jewish mission was also seen as justified by Jewish law. The very existence of laws concerning conversion was seen as a form of offering. Why codify laws at all if Judaism did not want converts? The existence of such Jewish law indicates that converts are allowed, that converts are welcomed, and that there are specific rites to undergo in order to convert. It is not clear when precisely these legal rules developed. They may have developed in the Second Temple period or after the destruction of the Temple. Certainly after the destruction of the Second Temple, there was an increasing need for clear religious rules to maintain a Jewish identity bereft of the unifying effects of common nationality, so that they were in place no later than 400-500 C.E.

Finally, Jews saw their mission as the dynamic for history's redemptive culmination, as part of the divine logic and love that would result in history reaching its aim. The logic of the Jewish worldview required the mission. God is universal, humanity is meant to be united, the Torah revealed by God is meant for all humanity, the Jewish people were chosen to receive the revelation and charged in their covenant with following its teachings, among which was to make God's universal message available to all, so that, with its acceptance, humanity might be redeemed.

The universalist mission was challenged by particularists who saw a more distinctive role for Jews and a separate covenant for the rest of humanity. According to this view, Gentiles are obliged to follow the moral code given to Noah and the Jewish mission is understood as teaching the Noachide laws to Gentiles. The Noachide laws mandated that all people refrain from idolatry,

incest, adultery, bloodshed, profaning God's name, injustice (by the positive act of establishing law courts), robbery, and such cruel acts as removing a limb from a living animal.

However, such a view does not fulfill the covenantal obligations made by the Jewish people. The fact that, in principle, any Gentile could become Jewish means that simply obeying the Noachide laws is not the highest spiritual goal available for Gentiles. At any rate, even if Jews did believe that their mission was limited to teaching the Noachide laws, such a mission was rarely undertaken.

For all these reasons, the Jewish mission of seeking converts was translated into concrete action during important periods of Jewish history.

As Salo W. Baron has noted (see "Population," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 13, 1971, col. 869), the Jews grew from 150,000 in 586 B.C.E. to more than eight million by the first century of the Common Era. Such an increase can be explained by the supposition that Jews actively welcomed large numbers of converts, mostly by the activities described above, but also by force in two unusual cases, the conversion of the Idumaeans (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 13, 257-258) and the Ituraeans (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.319).

The idea that Jews actively sought converts is buttressed not just by demography but by the hostile comments by Greek, Roman, and Christian authors about Jewish attempts to win converts. In Rome, for example, Tacitus, a rhetorical historian, Cicero, a lawyer, and Juvenal, a satirist, are bitter and serious about denouncing Jewish proselytizing activities. Horace (in *Satires* 1.4 142-143) makes fun of Jewish proselytizing efforts. Of course, the most famous Christian comment is Matthew 23:15, in which the seriousness of Jewish competition for converts can be seen: "Alas for you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte and anyone who becomes one you make twice as fit for hell as you are."

Early Christians had every reason, from their point of view, to be concerned. By the onset of the Christian era, ten percent of the Roman Empire was Jewish according to Baron (*Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 1, pp. 370-372). Indeed, it is intriguing to consider how differently history could have turned out. Had the Romans and Jews not fought, had the Romans not destroyed the Temple in 70 C.E., crushed the Bar Kokhba rebellion in 135 C.E., and ultimately expelled the Jews from Jerusalem, the efforts to win converts would have increased. It is not unreasonable to entertain the notion that, had Rome and Jerusalem not engaged in a bitter struggle to the end, the Romans would have chosen Judaism, not Christianity, and forever changed the course of history. As it was, however, Judaism was associated with the rebellious, hated, and ultimately defeated Judea, and Constantine converted to Christianity, giving shape to a Christian not a Jewish West.

The exilic history of the Jews following the loss of the Second Temple illustrated the dangers of lost power. One part of that paradigmatically tragic history was the fate of the Jewish efforts to win converts.

While Jewish efforts to win converts continued, the stateless and powerless Jews were restricted by Roman, and later Christian and Muslim, laws regarding proselytism. For example, Domitian ordered that converts be sent into exile and put to death. In 131 C.E. Hadrian prohibited circumcision and public instruction in the Jewish religion. In 198/199 the Emperor Severus promulgated laws that forbade Gentiles from embracing Judaism. In 335 Constantine reenacted Hadrian's law, forbidding Jews to circumcise non-Jewish slaves. There were many other examples of such restrictions, indicating both the existence of active conversionary efforts and the concern those efforts engendered.

Over time, however, the Jewish attitude toward welcoming converts changed. (This is not to suggest that the attitude had ever been uniformly positive. There are many references, such as Rabbi Helbo's well-known comment [Yevamot 47b and elsewhere] that "proselytes are injurious to Israel as a scab." There were, throughout Jewish history, particularists who opposed welcoming converts.) Cumulatively, the changes reversed the general Jewish attitude toward welcoming converts so that what was once considered a covenantal obligation became a neglected activity, ironically considered un-Jewish. Jews became reluctant to seek converts. There were many reasons for this radical transformation.

The first reason for the change in attitude toward welcoming converts is, of course, the persecutions by non-Jewish authorities. Both converts and the Jewish community were punished for such activity. The powerless Jewish community made the prudential decision to curtail such activities. Of course, the very powerlessness and characteristic minority status of the Jews added more subtle reasons for change than the rational elements inherent in making a prudential communal decision. Minority status produced profound psychological changes, resulting in, among other negative effects, a loss of self-worth that undermined the impulse to offer Judaism to the world.

Eventually, the Jewish community sought a justification to explain away their failure to meet their covenantal obligation, to explain their dismal existence, and to offer hope of escape from that existence. Such a justification was found in the particularist interpretation of Jewish theology, with the Jewish mission limited to one of simply following religious laws and waiting for the Messiah. The usefulness of such a view was obvious not only in simply surviving and justifying the change in mission, but in providing a hope for a better Jewish future in messianic times.

Christians took the Jewish mission to welcome converts and transformed its meaning. Seeking converts became a required activity because salvation was unavailable outside the Church. Intrusive activities, bribery, threats, and ultimately violence and murder, were tolerated by an expanding Christianity. Additionally, Christians had relaxed the Jewish rules of conversion, such as the need for male circumcision, and the obligation to obey Jewish law, making it much easier for a pagan to convert to Christianity than to Judaism. Finally, an

enmity developed between the triumphant Christians and the subjugated Jews. For all these reasons, Jews came to distrust conversion activity. Its original meaning had been subverted; potential converts might defect, seeing Christianity as an easier route; and Jews, with increasing justification, came to see Gentiles as the enemy, not a group whose members would want to convert or who would be welcome even if they chose to do so. It became more unpalatable to offer Judaism to the very people who mocked and persecuted, forcibly converted, and killed Jews. The idea of welcoming converts under such circumstances became repugnant. Of course, from the Gentile side, Jews were seen as guilty of deicide, and as a dispersed, weak people, object of pity, mockery, or persecution, but not one to consider joining.

Conversion's fate within Jewish law also reflected a significant shift in Jewish views. Medieval commentators on Jewish law, who were centered in France and Germany, included such authorities as Rashi and the Tosafists. The Tosafists argued that Jewish law requires the acceptance of converts. They saw seeking converts as a commandment for Jews. Besides commentators, the other group of Jewish teachers were the decision-makers who focused on codifying the law, the most famous, of course, being Maimonides. In general, these decision-makers were more restrictive in their attitude toward an active welcoming of converts.

To end confusion on the alternate rulings of these two groups of teachers on a variety of subjects, there were efforts to produce a code of Jewish law that could reflect both legal systems. The code that ultimately prevailed was Joseph Caro's *Shulhan Arukh*, supplemented by notes from Moses Isserles. In part, the *Shulhan Arukh* became authoritative because it was the first code produced after the printing press had been invented, and so it was rapidly and widely distributed throughout the Jewish world. At any rate, it took the more restrictive view in its very brief description of conversion (*Yoreh De'ah*, chapt. 268-269). Although Caro seems opposed to proselytizing actively, he does present the laws more favorably than the Spanish school and included some Tosafist opinions. He does not quote Rabbi Helbo. At one point, Caro even notes that prospective converts should be informed that all the idolatrous nations will perish, but that Israel will survive and that Judaism will become the sole religion. (Caro cites *Yevamot* 47a.) Although Caro is more solicitous than some of the decision-makers, his seeming opposition to actively welcoming converts contributed to the Jewish change in attitude toward such welcoming, which had begun long before, and to the demise of the Tosafist interpretation of such welcoming as a divine mandate. This change was more than cosmetic. A divine obligation must be performed independent of the consequences. Without such commandment, Jews were free to ignore the welcoming of converts.

This development in Jewish law cemented the opposition to conversion that had been building because of the other aforementioned reasons. Persecution and fear had led, over time, to the transformation of the Jewish under-

standing of its mission as spreading God's word to a denunciation of such a mission as not conforming to Jewish law. Missionary quiescence became the norm as Jews suffered in the exile from their homeland and waited for the Messiah. The Jewish people refused to deliver their message to houses other than their own.

Contemporary Jewry has inherited this transformed understanding of the Jewish mission. There are, however, a variety of historical reasons why the original idea of seeking converts can and should be accepted again.

The loss of national sovereignty, with its concomitant weakness, loss of self-assurance, and perception by others that the Jews had been passed by history—all this was a major reason for the transformation of the Jewish understanding of their covenantal obligation. Now, however, Israel has returned to history. National sovereignty is restored. For many centuries, a Jewish mission could be legitimately considered as endangering Jewish lives; that is no longer the case.

Once, Jewish religious competitors clearly seemed invincible; today, the competition for the human soul is open, with non-religious views actively participating. Simultaneously, rarely has there been a moment when the Jewish worldview was so widely needed. There is a genuine desire to learn about Judaism. There are currently about 200,000 converts to Judaism in the United States. Thousands of people become Jewish every year, mostly because their interest was piqued by a romantic relationship with a Jewish partner. Many more people, no doubt, would be attracted to Judaism if they knew of its beliefs and its accessibility. Whereas once many interpreters of Jewish law saw the law as only restricting mission, today there can be discussion about whether the law allows Jews to go back and reintroduce the original covenantal obligation.

Despite the fact that conditions favor the revival of the Jewish mission to offer Judaism to the world, American Jews seem to be unlikely candidates to lead that revival. This is so for various reasons, such as their differing notions of what Judaism is, or a perception that the advancement of Judaism is an invasion of others' privacy.

It is true that Judaism is, to put it mildly, subject to various interpretations. Yet, there are central and unique beliefs that most Jews can accept. These include: (1) stressing deeds rather than the acceptance of a particular ideology; (2) the view that sin is not inherent, but that humans have moral freedom to choose between right and wrong; (3) core values, such as the centrality of the family, the view that learning is a form of worship, and that the center of worship is performing good deeds; (4) identification with Jewish history and with the Jewish people historically; and, of course, (5) the unity of God as opposed, for example, to trinitarianism or other interpretations of monotheism.

The justifiable concern over not intruding on others will help mandate acceptable activities (such as offering classes, books and other materials, media



presentations, the use of advertisements, reading rooms, and so on) and discourage arguable or unacceptable activities (such as going door to door soliciting converts, stopping people at airports, on the street, and in other public places, and so on).

The choice of reintroducing pro-conversionary activities needs to be placed alongside all the other choices American Jews have. American Jews can continue as they have been doing and transform the definition of being Jewish from one of spiritual definition to one that focuses on communal participation or emotional attachment, but it is just such a transformation that has led to widespread assimilation. American Jews can assimilate, passively or actively, as many are doing, but there remains a large residue determined to maintain their distinctive Jewish identity. They can move to Israel, but most do not wish to. They can self-segregate, but most American Jews enjoy and wish to continue participating in American life. They can attempt to practice traditional Judaism and write off those Jews who do assimilate, but such efforts will inevitably lead to an attrition of American Jewry.

Another choice remains. American Jews can maintain an attachment to traditions and simultaneously reach out to offer Judaism, both to marginal Jews and to Gentiles. Such efforts to teach others, coherent with Jewish obligations made at Sinai, evident in Jewish history, can revitalize American Jewry.

American Jews are ambivalent about their spiritual selves. A practical group, sired by ancestors brimming with a politically progressive faith and a desire to relieve themselves of their inherited religion, American Jews are often uncomfortable with spiritual talk. However, the act of offering even ambivalently-held Judaism will force American Jews to the intellectually valuable acts of confronting and defining their religious identities. The teachers will learn as much as the students.

This is not to say there are no dangers in such a welcoming effort. There is the possibility, which must be faced, that welcoming converts could exacerbate divisions within Judaism between those who live by Halakhah and those who do not. The reality is that most converts are not converted according to the halakhic standards necessary to be regarded as Jews by many within the halakhic community. However, because all Jews recognize the possibility of legitimate conversion to Judaism, the issues involve who is doing the converting and the requirements for conversion rather than the existential act of conversion itself. As such, and because the arguments are internal to the community and not dependent on the views of any external force, there remains hope that, on legitimate halakhic grounds, some means can be found to overcome such divisions. Seeing the welcoming of converts as compatible with the Jewish tradition is a useful start to an honest search for a solution to this problem. It is important to note, however, that if welcoming converts is seen as a Jewish obligation, the fact that it leads to difficulties is not a sufficient reason to cease the welcoming efforts.

Those obligatory efforts, embedded in Jewish thought and practiced in Jewish history, need to be revived, not just because they are obligatory but also because they are practical, Instead of the embers of American Judaism dying out, it is possible to rekindle them, to make them shine, so that the Jewish people can resume their rightful historic role as a “light unto the nations.”

## Philosophy & the Holocaust

*Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide.* By Berel Lang. The University of Chicago Press, 1990. 258 pages. \$49.95 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

Reviewed by GARRY M. BRODSKY

A FEW YEARS BEFORE THIS BOOK WAS published, I asked its author, Professor Berel Lang, what he hoped to accomplish in it and, more generally, what he thought philosophy could make of—I shall use his term, for the reasons he offers—the Genocide of the Jews (henceforth, the Genocide).<sup>\*</sup> My question did not reflect the common belief that philosophy is only tangentially connected with history. To the contrary, like Lang, I think of philosophy as “talking further and less restrictively than other forms of discourse about questions in and of the world of common experience” and thus as situated in the midst of history (p. xvii). But while I was convinced that philosophers should be dealing with the Genocide, I found it extremely difficult to identify anything they could say about it that was relevant to philosophy, remotely adequate to it, and not already obvious. Further, I felt—and continue to feel—that the Genocide should not be treated simply or largely as material for philosophical examples and exercises, as happens when students are asked whether it poses particularly difficult problems for theism or teaches us important moral lessons.

<sup>\*</sup> Lang uses the term “genocide” rather than “Holocaust” or “*shoah*” in order to employ a term with no “theological” or “mediating overtones” to refer to what the Nazis did (p. xxi).

GARRY M. BRODSKY is *Professor of Philosophy at the University of Connecticut*.

Of course, philosophers can help determine what ideas in Western thought and culture were causal factors in bringing it about and participate in the critical examination of the various historical and non-historical explanations advanced to account for it. These jobs are well worth doing, and the fact that doing them requires that the Genocide be dealt with as a topic of inquiry like any other such topic should not stand in the way of our doing them. So, even in this case, it is appropriate to acknowledge the validity of Peirce’s contention that the road to inquiry should not be blocked. But it is equally appropriate to insist that the Genocide not become grist for philosophy’s mill or lost sight of by philosophers as they discuss it in analytic and general ways and deal with it via the questions which fascinate them.

Professor Lang responded to my questions by observing that the failure of philosophy to deal adequately with the Genocide would reveal something deeply significant both about it and about the Genocide. I took him to mean that, were this the case, philosophy would be cut off from an immense, ghastly, historical reality—if not the most ghastly, then certainly one of the ghastly realities in human history—and that, if the Genocide resisted philosophical grasp, it would remain beyond the pale of intelligibility. It seemed to me that this answer was exactly right and that Lang was equally right to hold that each of these alternatives was profoundly important and unsatisfactory. What I could not see until I had the actual work to consider was how he would make good on the promises implicit in his remarks without falling into the bombastic, moralistic, trivializing traps which stand in wait for writers on this topic.

One of the most valuable and important features of *Act and Idea* is the way it deals with these problems and misgivings. To identify this feature, I observe that, along with thinking about the Genocide, philosophy can address itself to the Genocide in yet more basic ways, namely, by thinking it or bringing it to conceptual representation. Of course, thinking something involves various conceptual activities and, hence, it involves thinking about some things. Still, when one's concern is to think some thing, one does the latter to achieve the former in much the same way that, on occasion, an art critic discusses some features of a painting to facilitate the experience of the painting and not the understanding of a theory of art.

Lang indicates the importance of thinking the Genocide when he observes that thinking or writing about it is often "meant to convey the common or a personal sense of horror, serves too often as a rhetorical incentive for memory, assuming a role of surrogate in which voice substitutes for conscience, so that the need to feel displaces reflection, or substitutes even for feeling itself" (p. xi). Obviously, when this takes place the Genocide fades from view. He also shows how important it is to think the Genocide when he describes his efforts to teach about it. What he found was that students—good, decent ones—ostensibly interested in learning about the Genocide, resisted confronting it and, instead, substituted "for what was plainly there before their eyes a set of oblique replacements" (p. 236). For example, when asked what should be made of Eichmann and the SS man who asked Simon Wiesenthal to forgive him, they turned away from a consideration of the evil these men did and wanted in-

stead to discuss whether the Israelis were not also at fault in abducting, trying, and executing Eichmann, and to argue that because the SS man was a soldier, he was a product of his background and training and hence not responsible for his behavior (p.235).

Lang traces this "halfhearted, half-minded" avoidance of moral judgment on the students' part to the fact that their chief values were tolerance and pluralism, real values but not themselves sufficient to "do the work of moral judgment or action" (p. 238). If he is right, as I think he is, it is clear that we need a relatively clear concept of the Genocide that will facilitate a grasp of the evil which must be faced in all serious thought of and about it. By employing classical questions of philosophy and the critical, analytic treatments of problems in the history of ideas and the philosophy of history to help make clear what must be thought to think the Genocide, Lang not only demonstrates the capacity of philosophy to come to grips with this historical reality, but employs philosophy to keep us from losing sight of an occurrence, which, he shows, is all too easily replaced in consciousness with representations that enable us to avoid facing up to it.

At the basis of Lang's effort is his recognition of the obvious fact that the Genocide was more than "an idea or set of ideas" and "also more than a thoughtless or accidental series of historical events" (p. xviii). Rather, it consisted in the "convergence" of acts and ideas. Accordingly, Lang employs historical data in the course of spelling out the ideas at work in the Genocide and vice versa.

Beginning with the ideas, Lang notes that while the term "genocide" has become an emotive one, connot-

ing little more than "extraordinary wrongdoing" or "violence and mass death" (p. 4), it was originally intended to represent something much more specific, namely, the destruction of a human group or kind. Further, following Raphael Lemkin, Lang points out that various "aspects of group existence" can be targeted for destruction, such as the political, social, cultural, economic, biological, physical, religious, or moral life of a group. Of course, if the biological life of a group is destroyed then the other aspects of its existence will also be destroyed. But the same does not hold true if a group's religious or cultural life is destroyed (p. 7). The Nazi genocide of the Jews, "genocide in its most extreme and unequivocal form . . . in effect, the 'paradigm' form of Genocide," made war on a group genetically defined (pp. 13-14), and it is here even more than in the large number of its victims that its distinctiveness lies.

By taking note of the distinction between mass murder and genocide, Lang brings two features of the Genocide into view. The first, is that those attacked "retain, neither as individuals nor as a group, any agency in the rationale or justification for that process. . . . Genocide singles them out by their identification with a group quite apart from any choices they have of identity or character" (p. 15). Any individual differences between an individual and the group stereotype are "interpreted as superficial and accidental," for the verdict against the individual follows from his possession "of a *generic* essence that is irrefutable at the level of individuals" (p. 15). And the second, is that "the agent of genocide requires nothing from his victims except their destruction and that in setting this condition he acts on a prin-

ciple that is categorical and non-utilitarian" (p. 15).

This account of the idea of genocide, when defended and amplified with historical materials, leads to Lang's conclusion that it "comes as close as any act of which humanity has experience" (p. 29) to being a case of evil done not only knowingly but because it is evil and hence of an action which is not only wrong but wrong by the lights of the agents committing it (p. 22). To establish this, it must be shown that the Genocide was an intentional act. But in view of the character of decision-making in a totalitarian regime, it might be held, as Lang notes, that the intention was "fragmentary, or unclear, not fully formed or deliberate at all" (p. 23). Further, Lang takes the historical evidence to show that the Nazis did not start out with the idea of genocide as a goal, but "came to it . . . by a succession of steps" (p. 9), and he also refers to the commonly known fact that no documentary evidence has been found of an order by Hitler or the Nazi hierarchy to carry out the Genocide (p. 24).

However, Lang argues that these points do not stand in the way of treating the Genocide as an intentional act. So, he deals with the character of the historical evidence of a decision to carry out the Genocide by observing that a "pattern of concealment" pervades the planning and execution of the Final Solution, and argues that this is better explained on the grounds that the perpetrators of the Genocide had a guilty awareness of what was intended than that they did not explicitly intend to carry out the Genocide. And he responds to the other challenges to the view that the Genocide was intentional by arguing, first, that it could not have been carried out without "stages of

deliberation” marked by a denial of obvious evidence\* (p. 22) and, second, that we will only take such challenges seriously if we think that to act intentionally is to do so on the basis of mental acts which precede, and are independent of, the actions realizing them. If, however, we hold that an intention may emerge in the course of action and also realize that often the evidence that an action is intentional lies in the action itself and in the fact that treating it as intentional is the only way to make sense of it, then nothing stands in the way of the conclusion that the Genocide was an intentional act.

From the fact that the Genocide was intentional, it does not follow that it was a case of evil being done because it is evil. For, it might be argued, that the Nazis made war on the Jews because they believed, as they frequently claimed, that the Jews were a “biological menace” to the German people, “comparable in danger and malignancy to disease” (pp. 37, 38). If this were the case, then the Genocide would have a “utilitarian rationale” and its pursuit would constitute a case not of doing evil because it is evil but of something far more understandable, namely, doing evil in the pursuit of a good. But Lang argues that this account of the motives of the Nazis won’t do, for the simple reason that, on numerous occasions when the pursuit of the Genocide conflicted with the “requirements of self-preservation,” the Nazis “were willing to increase the risk

that they would lose the wider war . . . in order to wage their war against the Jews” (pp. 16, 39, 202, and p. 202 n. 40).

It might also be argued that the Nazis pursued the Genocide not because they chose to do evil but because they believed the racial theories they proclaimed, according to which the Jews are not human, and took literally their metaphorical references to the Jews as pestilence or disease. In this case, the Nazis would have been guilty not of willing to do evil as evil but of culpable ignorance (pp. 20, 35). But Lang again invokes history to make clear what must be thought in thinking the Genocide. For the fact is, that the Nazis employed “systematic brutality and degradation” to dehumanize those they intended to kill before doing so (p. 21). As this indicates, they did not fail to perceive the humanity of their intended victims. Rather, as Lang insists, they “saw in their victims a shared humanity, not non-humans threatening them with moral danger” (p. 22).

Lang further supports his contention that the Genocide is a case of evil being done because it is evil by calling attention to three features of the Nazi Genocide: contradiction, i.e., conflicts between Nazi statements and practices and within Nazi characterizations of the Jews; shame, as revealed in the Nazi policies of concealment and as testifying to their awareness that they were moral criminals; and invention, the effort to ensure that in carrying out the Genocide “no moral limit or rule shall go unviolated” (p. 45).

I hope this sketch has made the character of Lang’s approach to the Genocide clear, and shown that his view, that to think it we must do so as a case of evil being done because it is evil, is persuasive. Of course, the idea that at times some people do evil because it

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\* Lang points out that the Genocide required three stages of deliberation: first, it was necessary to identify individual Jews not as individuals but as members of a group; second, it was necessary to maintain that the Jews possessed an essence which posed a danger to the German nation; and third, it was necessary to conclude that only extermination would cope with this danger (p. 22).



is evil rather than because they are mad or culpably ignorant or because they pursue some good is, as philosophers from Plato on realized, profoundly baffling, if not downright paradoxical. But it is extremely difficult to see how any but a radical, baffling, and perhaps paradoxical idea could serve the purpose of bringing the Genocide before our minds.

Along with providing this framework for thinking the Genocide, Lang deals with questions which concern the problems of writing and teaching about it and understanding it as an historical occurrence. He also discusses the complex issues which face Jews who have confronted the Genocide and chosen not to live in Israel. In all these cases, his views merit sustained, serious consideration and in all of them his examination of problems of intrinsic interest serve his purpose of helping his reader face, rather than avoid facing, the Genocide.

In what follows I shall briefly discuss his contention that "certain conceptual or ideological origins" of the Genocide are found in the Enlightenment (pp. 168-69). Two large propositions mark out the lines of Lang's argument; namely, that (1) reductionistic Marxist and/or psychoanalytic explanations which exclude any causal role for ideas in the Genocide offer "no satisfactory explanation for the *prima facie* evidence"; and (2) "unless the Nazi Genocide against the Jews is viewed as an aberration or madness, a break in history itself . . . the one possible alternative is to locate that event in relation to its historical antecedents" (p. 194). Both points are well taken.

Lang clarifies his thesis by pointing out that he is not claiming that the only ideas which played a causal role in bringing about the genocide had

their origins in the Enlightenment (p. 195), or that the relation between the Enlightenment and the Genocide is one of "direct cause and effect" (p. 168). Nor does he hold that the "Nazis, consciously and as a group, arrived at a death sentence for the Jews of Europe by deducing it" from premises found in Enlightenment thought (p. 192). And, finally, he is not claiming that it was inevitable that ideas latent in the Enlightenment became manifest in the Genocide (p. 195).

What Lang does maintain is that there is a "conceptual analogy" (p. 182 and cf. pp. 168-69) between certain ideas of the Enlightenment and ideas of the Genocide which, in fact, the Genocide "*required*" (p. 169). Thus, "certain features of one ideational structure reappear as features of a second and later one, serving in both structures a similar motivating role and connecting them also at specific historical junctures" (p. 189). In addition, he holds that the causal link between these two conceptual structures is best understood as a "qualified causal connection" (p. 198), which is "stronger than analogy or likeness, although more oblique than that of direct physical causality" (p. 189). In another place he speaks of this as "affiliation" (p. 182) and does not hesitate to assert that, *ceteris paribus*, had different "ideas been substituted for the 'cause,' the outcome . . . would also have been different" (p. 198). These points make themselves felt in Lang's view of the process of transmission between the ideas of the Enlightenment and the Genocide. According to it, the ideas of the Enlightenment persisted as ideas do, "by clearing a conceptual space which their implications or affiliations then occupy," and so, the Nazis, while neither directly appropri-

ating any ideas found in Enlightenment thought as such nor logically deducing their conclusions from Enlightenment premises, made manifest and brought to the surface what had been "latent" or "present before as an internal and broad condition" (pp. 192-93).

Specifically, Lang points out that the major figures of the Enlightenment (Kant, Diderot, Voltaire, Hume, and Lessing) share "the impulse for universalization" (pp. 178-79). This, along with an equally shared conception of "judgment as reason," is expressed in the Enlightenment's opposition "to all claims for particularism, the more intensely as the latter claims base themselves on historical grounds" (p. 182) in the Enlightenment's "continuing criticism of difference itself and the ideological structure underlying it," and in the practices of exclusion which go along with these views. (p. 186) This impulse, Lang claims, has an analogue in, and is "not independent of," the "racial definition of particularism" which led to the Final Solution (pp. 204-05). And the fact that the Jews were victims of this "drive for universalization" and its correlative intolerance of particularism is to be accounted for on the grounds that, after as well as before the Enlightenment, they "retained an identity . . . that was bound to test severely any prescription for universalism" (p. 204).

In addition, Lang contends that the Enlightenment conviction that civic rights should rest on the possession of a "universal self" and not on inherited status, etc., has, as its flip side, the requirement that the self "assume a new role integral to the life of the community," which places in a particularly bad light those "particularist commitments . . . that had otherwise confirmed the diverse identities of indi-

viduals or groups" (p. 184). Where this requirement is not met, the Enlightenment objects to the inclusion of the Jews into the "new post-Enlightenment social or political structure" on the grounds that instead of committing themselves to the "new regime" and its possibility of "freedom and equality" by renouncing their differences "of cult or custom," the Jews opt to retain their identity (pp. 184-85). Further, and more generally, Lang claims that "In a social or conceptual structure which stresses equality of rights as a function of the equality of persons, individual differences and *a fortiori* group differences become suspect and the rights that would 'normally' be ascribed to them, problematic" (p. 186). Thirdly, he argues that the Enlightenment "impulse for universalization or totalization is pivotal—first, for conceiving the self in terms of a formally general definition . . . and then, for basing the definition of that universal self on formal criteria which cannot, however, be applied formally" (p. 189).

Conceived in this way, the self can be further defined and, thus, practical inferences can be drawn from such a definition which are at best arbitrary or, as in the case of the Nazis, will be used as "a pretext used to conceal other purposes" (p. 189). This, however, should not surprise us. For the Enlightenment's universalist definition of the self "implies that the concept of humanity is not exclusionary" and yet, because it is to be applied, it requires a criterion of exclusion, since without one "there would be nothing that was not a self" (p. 190). Thus, the "formal principle" turns into "a substantive and then arbitrary standard" when applied to groups and persons and this, Lang contends, is no acci-

dent because the Enlightenment has "no place in it for the consideration that people live and act within groups or as individuals, not (or not only) abstractly or generally, but historically or particularly" (p. 190).

Lang finds roughly the same ideas in Kant's thought. For Kant wants to affirm our "intellectual independence" from institutional privilege," "hierarchical structures," and "tradition and history" (pp. 170-71). This goal and his universalistic commitments are at the basis of his belief that "man's claim to moral status" is grounded in his capacity to universalize, which, in turn, must be situated in a "noumenal, or extrahistorical, self" (p. 175). It is also evident in his convictions that "human beings are by definition alike in their essential nature" and that the differences between them are either "morally insignificant" or "moral liabilities" (p. 175). For him, persons are "defined in terms of certain common or universal characteristics"; particular ethical judgments are to be tested on the basis of whether they can be universalized; and the rights of the individual depend on the recognition of a universal self (p. 179). Most importantly for my purposes, Lang claims that Kant's view is (or implies) that "in order first to determine the self's status as a self, the requirement of commonality or universalization in the self must first be met, and the judgment of this depends at least as much on external or public scrutiny as it does on introspective judgment, which could hardly, after all, be disinterested" (p. 179).

Perhaps the first thing to be recognized in coming to grips with Lang's position is that the figures of the Enlightenment were by no means free of anti-Semitism. But how is this to be

understood? Is the hostility of the Enlightenment to the Jews and the demands it placed upon them a function of its (alleged) hostility to all particularity, or is its unwillingness to treat the Jews as it treats others akin, for example, to Locke's unwillingness to extend toleration to atheists? In raising this question, I observe that while Lang points out that Enlightenment anti-clericalism could attack Judaism but not Christianity with impunity and calls attention to the anti-Semitism of Fichte, Goethe, *et al.*, he does not explicitly consider the hypothesis that this anti-Semitism caused Enlightenment thinkers to misconstrue and misrepresent their own views when dealing with the Jews. Thus, he does not explicitly examine the obvious hypothesis that since the thinkers of the Enlightenment could not fully escape their own history, their work was marred by a deep, residual anti-Semitism which is external to the Enlightenment itself. If this hypothesis is sound, then the villain of this piece is not the Enlightenment and its universalistic aspirations, but the long, shameful history of European anti-Semitism and the limited capacities of human beings to critically understand their own ideas and prejudices.

Second, Lang supports his claim that the Enlightenment is hostile to "difference itself" on the grounds of its universalism and its hostility to religious superstition and inherited social and political privileges. Since it appears reasonable to be hostile to religious superstition and inherited social and political privileges without being hostile to "difference itself," I would think more evidence is wanted for the conclusion that latent in the Enlightenment is the wish for a radically non-pluralistic, homogeneous

sociopolitical order which could be expressed in the Final Solution. Before leaving this question, I point out that the Enlightenment ideal of cosmopolitanism and its valorization of tolerance can be cited as evidence that no such wish is intrinsic to this scheme of thought. Since these views and values occupy prominent places in any conceptual or real spaces cleared by the Enlightenment, the conclusion to be drawn is that the Enlightenment is profoundly opposed to the radical anti-particularism of the Nazis.

Turning to Lang's claim that a "causal connection" exists between the Enlightenment and the Genocide, I think it should be granted that to establish this, he need not show that there exists "direct physical causality" between the two. However, his case would be much stronger were he to show that, as a matter of fact, the ideas of the Enlightenment were transmitted to, and available in, various popular and non-popular forms and versions contributing to the culture which made the Genocide possible. This is particularly important for, *prima facie*, the ideology of the Genocide has a much greater affiliation with the anti-modern values and politics of Romanticism, such as anti-intellectualism, *Volkschkeit*, the wish for an organic society and for community, than with the Enlightenment.

Lang might reply that these points don't touch upon what is most troubling about the Enlightenment and what does seem to contain the place for, if not the germ of, the anti-particularism of the Genocide, namely, its universalism. As I pointed out earlier, Lang claims, first, that universalism yields only a formal definition of the self, which admits of all kinds of specifications when applied practi-

cally; and, second, that implicit in it there really is (or lurks) a substantive view which runs roughshod over all the ways in which human beings differ from one another and requires us, when thinking about ourselves and others, to do the same.

Partisans of the Enlightenment, and theorists who treat "equality of rights as a function of the equality of persons," can reply to the first charge by insisting that the formal definition of a person and the natural rights delimiting the human person as abstractly and formally defined hold true more or less directly and immediately of anything identifiable as a human being. This is consistent with the universalist conception of the self favored by the Enlightenment. For the burden of that conception lies in removing particular religious, social, and political qualifications for what might be called first-class membership in the human community. And it yields a reply to Lang's claim that this conception of the self is "exclusionary" and admits of further definition.

The reply is that the conception is not intended to be exclusionary. To the contrary, it is intended to acknowledge and underscore the fact that a certain moral and political status is had by all human beings by virtue of being human beings and nothing else. Far from being open to further specifications, this position wards off any efforts to introduce additional requirements for first-class membership in the human community, and provides those whose status as human selves has yet to be acknowledged with the conceptual grounds upon which to argue their respective cases. Further, in its view that while we differ from one another we share a common humanity, the Enlightenment not only requires us to be

tolerant and respectful of group and individual differences, but also encourages us to value these differences as ways in which our shared humanity is expressed. Thus, it is not a stimulant of, but an antidote to, ethnocentrism and xenophobia, and hence opposes ideas at work in the Genocide.

My reply to Lang's second charge, and the interpretation of Kant he advances, supports the conclusion that Enlightenment universalism does not stand in the way of an appreciation of the fact that human beings exist as particular, historical individuals and groups. One reason for holding this is that Kant's stress upon universalizability and his talk of an ahistorical, noumenal self are connected with his effort to support the belief in human autonomy and with it the belief that human beings have some ability to gain critical purchase upon some parts of themselves and their lives. So, Kant argues that human behavior is not exclusively determined by natural and sociohistorical cause, and hence that people can determine their actions on the basis of reasons which are distinct from the causes which can also be seen to determine these actions. While I suspect that he might have done well simply to insist that we have this capacity, Kant supports and explains his position by positing the noumenal self. But, in any event, what is important for present purposes is that while Kant, like virtually all moralists, insists that we can and should deal with many of the concrete, material features of our lives critically and take responsibility for how we cope with them and thus for some parts of our identities, he does not argue that we can or should attempt to free ourselves from all of these material features or from our particular

identities. For this reason, the capacity to universalize, which Kant believes is at the basis of the moral life and the noumenal self he posits to account for this capacity, does not undermine human particularity.

The second thing which needs to be recognized about Kant's claims about universalization and its relation to the self's self, is that the "commonality and universalization" which Kant requires of a self to secure its moral status is easily met. In living the moral life we are, of course, required to live by maxims we can universalize. Thus, in the domain of morality we must be prepared to set aside our individual and group differences and attempt to justify our moral actions on grounds that we want all our fellow human beings to employ and, therefore, to judge the moral actions of others on the same grounds we would have others judge our moral actions. According to Kant, the capacity to do this is what enables human beings to lay claim to moral status; similarly, the claim which human beings make for a special place in the order of things rests upon their claim to possess this capacity. A self living in this way would, as Kant says, know that what "marks him out" as an end in himself is "the fitness of his maxims to make universal law" or, as Kant goes on, to function as a law-maker "always choosing his maxims from the point of view of himself" and, *as he immediately adds*, "also of every other rational being."<sup>\*</sup> So Kant requires that, when we act and judge morally, we do so in the light of reasons which make sense not only from our own standpoints but from the

\* *The Moral Law: Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by H. J. Paton (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1969), pp. 105-06.

standpoints of all other human beings. Obviously, a self living in a world in which human behavior meets this standard would have nothing to fear from doing so, since its point of view would have to be acknowledged in any legislative activities carried on by all other selves. Finally, there is no reason why human beings who acknowledge this and hold that moral life is governed by universal maxims should not also realize that people differ from one another, and desire and are morally entitled to rather extensive liberties which allow them to exercise their particular tastes, talents, and abilities as they like in other areas of their lives.

In conclusion, I want to make two points. First, I do not doubt that Lang is right to hold that ideas and movements of European thought played an important causal role in bringing about the Genocide and, further, to connect the Genocide to ideas which engendered and supported (and, alas, continue to do so) a deep-seated, indeed a savage, intolerance of difference in European civilization. But, as I have suggested, the Enlightenment and its universalistic aspirations were not and are not a principal source or stimulus of this intolerance. Second, I believe that it is no accident that, in the effort to think about the Genocide, basic questions arise concerning the most important intellectual movements in European civilization and about the most basic and important philosophical ideas and principles, and that basic differences between thinkers emerge. This is understandable and unavoidable, and even desirable, if it contributes, as I hope my discussion does, to helping us grasp an evil which, Lang rightly claims, resists our efforts to think, let alone, comprehend.

### Urbane Traditionalism

*The Theology of Nahmanides Systematically Presented.* By David Novak. Scholars Press, 1993. 149 pages. \$59.95.

*Jewish Social Ethics.* By David Novak. Oxford University Press, 1992. 272 pages. \$45.00.

*Reviewed by* ALAN J. YUTER

THESE TWO VOLUMES EMBODY THE most mature and enduring statement of David Novak, American Judaism's most independent and urbane Traditionalist thinker. Novak's Traditionalist thought is grounded in, but not limited by, Judaism's halakhic tradition. He applies historical and philosophical methods in his address of contemporary social problems, and yet for all his urbanity, his thought is located within classical Jewish parameters, as he regularly espouses positions which will outrage the politically correct secular consensus. It is no accident that Novak's *Jewish Social Ethics* is accompanied by a wonderful monograph on Nahmanides (Ramban), for Ramban provides the classical model for his contemporary Jewish inquiry. Like his late revered teacher Abraham Joshua Heschel, Novak rejects what is taken to be the "pan-halakhic heresy," according to which all Jewish values must be quantified in Halakhah if they are to be considered to be normative.

Novak correctly and insightfully connects Nahmanides' comments con-

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ALAN J. YUTER is Rabbi of Congregation Israel in Springfield, New Jersey, and an Assistant Professor of Judaic Studies at Touro College in Brooklyn, New York.



cerning the Torah command “You shall be holy” (Lev. 19:1; Nahmanides *ad loc.*), that one might be a “wretch (*naval*) while conforming to the behavior the Torah permits (*bi-reshut ha-Torah*),” with the generic obligation that the Jew must always do “what is good and what is right (*tov ve-yashar*)” (Deut. 6:18; Nahmanides, *ad loc.*). According to Novak’s reading of Nahmanides, “extra-self restraint, for the sake of God, can itself be a holy act.” The sin of the Nazarite is not the rejection of the world, but the inevitable return to the impure world which had been rejected. According to this view, the Torah law, while necessary for the fulfillment of God’s will, is not sufficient to accomplishing the task. Novak does not complete Nahmanides’ comments to Leviticus 19:1, which remind the reader that one attains holiness “by removing oneself from impurity.” Nahmanides, ever the zealous mystic, offers no explanation or defense of this assertion; it is “obvious” that staying away from impurity reflects God’s plan for humankind. Similarly, God “loves what is good and what is right.” The question, unanswered by both Nahmanides and Novak, is how one knows what is good and what is right, or how does one know that God desires that Israel remove itself from impurity.

For Novak, *imitatio Dei* “requires imaginative application in concrete, specific circumstances, of the general principles of justice and equality laid down in the Torah” (emphasis mine). For Novak (and Nahmanides), the “theology which finds reasons for God’s commandments cannot view them as mere positive decrees.” Following Heschel, Novak argues that it is “proper intention . . . that distinguishes authentic religious actions

from . . . religious behaviorism.” While conceding that neither he nor Nahmanides is arguing that “holiness can be attained without observing the Torah,” both argue that “the intention of holiness should lead one to do more than the letter of the law requires.”

Novak regularly affirms the basic normativity of the law, even as he sees the letter of the law as a morally minimal limit. While one may argue with Novak’s assigning of natural law to classical Judaism—and in *Jewish Social Ethics*, he concedes that the classical tradition has no term for the doctrine—his assignation of this doctrine to Nahmanides is not only justified, it represents his own theological position:

Nahmanides accepts the legitimacy of natural law on the interhuman level. But such morality and revelation are not located on the same plane. Morality comes from humans (at least in its most elemental manifestations). Revelation comes to them.

While “morality does not itself lead to revelation . . . it is a precondition for it.” The means, methods, and mind-set whereby Nahmanides and Novak determine divine intent, and the concerns which inform their filling the “gaps in the law,” are markedly different. For Nahmanides, astrology is a natural science, the aggadic statements of the Talmud are not theologically binding, and human beings, through mysticism, can penetrate Judaism’s higher truths. The acceptance of astrology, no less than the rejection of science, reflects the ideas of Nahmanides’ age. For Nahmanides, God’s opinions and needs reflect ultimate reality, while rabbinic authority may be challenged. Nahmanides is willing to challenge the opinions of

rabbinic sages; he claims that God does have needs, and theology determines what ultimate divine intent really is.

The *locus classicus* for this problem is the Maimonidean claim that one is required to believe in God's existence by Torah law, whereas for Nahmanides, this belief is a condition rather than a requirement of the law. Novak appropriately calls attention to the statement in B. Makkot 23b-24a, which lists belief in God a commandment, and defends the Nahmanidean (as well as his own) demurrer with the fact that Hasdai ibn Crescas and Joseph Albo also believe that law and theology must not be confused. Implied in this citation is the assertion that because medieval scholars disagreed, there is a legitimate difference of opinion. According to the Talmud, the command to believe is a command. By arguing that since this command is theological, and not legal, it cannot be a command, one lights on the conundrum cited above, in which, in addition to following the positive laws of the Torah, there are criteria for religious normativity that are not explicit in the law.

The notion that God actually desires "extra-self restraint," as well as the doctrine that there is a "law beyond the law," find little resonance in talmudic thought, while they are common ideas in Catholic natural-law theology. Novak was not only trained by Heschel, he studied philosophy under leading Catholic thinkers. The natural-law thinker attempts, applying a divinely created human reason, to read, however approximately, God's mind. Novak regularly and insightfully calls his reader's attention to precisely this goal of Nahmanides' Torah Commentary. However, the Maimonidean requirement to "know God" has gener-

ally been misunderstood. Maimonides makes it clear that God is unknowable. The idiom of *yedi 'at ha-Shem* should be better rendered as being *intimate* with God, as the Hebrew root for knowledge also resonates this secondary meaning. Hence, Maimonides connects *knowing* with *loving* God.

For Novak, Maimonidean eschatology places '*olam ha-ba*' as "an eternal transcendent realm," what he terms a "world beyond," existing timeless beside this world," while for Nahmanides, the world to come "signifies a future age, not yet experienced in the past." Philology supports the Maimonidean rendering as the Hebrew idiom '*olam ha-ba*' is more appropriately rendered as "eternity to come," not "world to come," following the mishnaic citation (San. 10:1) of Isaiah 60:21, *le-'olam yirshu 'arets*, "the righteous will inherit the world forever."

While locating himself in a world very different from that of Nahmanides, Novak finds in his medieval teacher a model for his philosophical agenda. Following Nahmanides, Novak is committed, but not limited to, the statutory normativity of Jewish law. When the subjective sense of the halakhic thinker is informed by theological concerns, halakhic prescription assumes a maturity absent in much halakhic discussion among Traditional Jews. While Novak is consistently "Traditional," which is a sense of situatedness in compromised Halakhic commitment, he regularly distances himself from what he takes to be a narrow, parochial application of most Orthodox thinkers.

Novak does not deal with the fact that as an academic philosopher, his community of significant others, with which he reacts, is rather different

from that of the Orthodox Jewish community. On the one hand, Novak identifies with the traditional dogma of the Mosaic authorship of the Torah, while he consciously applies the idiom “Deutero-Isaiah,” which refers to the critical view that the biblical book of Isaiah reflects composite authorship. To deny Mosaic authorship would place Novak outside of the Historical tradition, while the denial of the singular authorship of Isaiah, while “deviationist,” is not strictly speaking heretical, and signals Novak’s commitment to critical/historical, as well as traditional/halakhic, discourse. The idiom is used as a political theological badge, because Novak does not deal with the theological and epistemological issues in accepting a critical methodology and its conclusions in post-Torah writings, while not applying those methods and findings to the Torah.

While Novak prefers the personal freedom and theological speculation of Nahmanides, he does not explain why he is a philosopher in the Maimonidean tradition; and Nahmanides was most critical of Maimonides’ philosophical enterprise, for which he not only found no talmudic warrant, but which he believed, like many Christians of his day, was deleterious to one’s faith. Novak concedes this subjectivity in his claim that his “reading of the normative Jewish tradition is selective but responsible, for the tradition is where I live.” He is not an “outsider” looking in, but he is, as a committed believing Jew, a trained reflective scholar “looking out from it [Jewish tradition] onto the larger world on its horizon.”

Since Orthodox rabbinic seminarians are untrained in “theological discourse,” the origins of which are in the Christian academy, it is no accident that Novak “looks out from” his Tra-

dition, while most Orthodox thinkers define their commitments in exclusively Jewish language, concerns, and ideas. For Novak, Judaism must adopt the theological language of the day if it is to retain credibility. This rhetorical/cultural position, it should be noted, is closer to Maimonides than Nahmanides. While Novak is impatient with what he takes to be Orthodoxy’s parochialism, he is scandalized by liberal Judaism’s “overcoming of Judaism” as a “moral imperative.” Novak’s idiom is biographical, as he resigned from Conservative Judaism’s Rabbinical Assembly, which often rejected halakhic imperative, or *mitzva*, because it conflicted with a moral imperative which, for Novak, is alien to Judaism’s commanding voice.

Novak’s *Jewish Social Ethics* represents a personal attempt to illustrate a Jewish response to larger moral issues. Because he believes that Judaism offers governance for Jews and guidance for others, he rejects the view of many halakhically committed Jews that Judaism must be expressed parochially, as well as those who believe that Halakhah is only a guide. By filtering the content of Halakhah into normative theological statements, Novak successfully translates the message of Judaism into an idiom that will be familiar, and hence credible, to a philosophically informed non-Jewish audience. Novak’s abiding contribution is that his use of philosophical idiom does not secularize the message or meaning of his mission. Because he believes that halakhic positivism is unduly parochial, and because he maintains that Judaism must provide a reason why the Jew is commanded and covenanted, he rejects the philosophical positivism of Leo Strauss and the Orthodox positivism of José Faur

and Marvin Fox. A thoughtful positivist response to Novak would be that the quest for a reason to keep the law above and beyond the law creates a legal, conceptual hierarchy, and the theological/social Torah covenant recognizes distinctions, but not hierarchies.

It must be noted that Novak's quest for a ground for the law is better attested in Christian moral theology than it is in Jewish aggadic sources. He cites his late teacher Boaz Cohen with the question that "the phrase *nivra ha'olam* [the world was created] is the nearest the rabbis came to the term *Natura*." Consequently, he understands the explicit biblical prohibition of homosexuality to be "inconsistent with human nature." Citing aggadic (which is for Novak, theological) as well as halakhic materials, Novak maintains Judaism's singular voice on the subject, while conceding that "in the Greco-Roman world . . . individual homosexuality was quite common." For Novak, Judaism's moral voice is autonomous; it must not be an echo of an alternative ethic, regardless of its source.

Novak's treatment of Jewish sexuality correctly locates the monthly separation (*niddah*) as a "cultivation of (licit) eros," yet he views ideological homosexuality as an intolerable and incompatible assault on Judaism's ethic. For Novak, homosexuality is based on a lie, for either male or female in such a relationship must assume a role not reflective of her/his own being. This insight is well taken, but is not necessarily born by the sources, as lesbianism is forbidden by rabbinic legislation, and male homosexuality by Torah statute. Inasmuch as rabbinic legislation is required to outlaw the former delict, the prohibition of lesbian activity is foundation-

ally conventional in Torah theology. For Novak, one who engages in regular homosexual activity cannot be classified as *mumar le-te'avon*, a sinner who succumbs to weakness, but as *mumar le-hakh'is*, a provocative sinner who assaults legal and ethical norms. For Novak, homosexual promiscuity is consistently anti-family. Nevertheless, Novak maintains that those suffering AIDS must be treated with compassion. The job of God is to judge, the job of humankind is *hesed*, lovingkindness. Novak's insight is corroborated by B. Sanhendrin 104b, according to which the sages considered counting King Solomon as one who forfeited his portion in the eternity to come, and an oracle (*bat kol*) announced that while the law is surrendered to the human court, God's judgment is not.

In his treatment of the Sabbath, technology, and its threat to God's created order, Novak again concedes that "there is no idea of nature in the classical scriptural and rabbinic texts," and proceeds to demonstrate that for Judaism, unlike Aristotle, the Sabbath is an end, not a means. This comports well with the doctrine that the Sabbath is an instrument of human completeness.

Novak's statement of self-understanding challenges both liberal and traditionalist thinkers. In discussing the place of the non-Jew in Jewish polity, or how a sovereign state of Israel must treat its non-Jewish citizens, he rejects historical criticism because it is a descriptive rather than a normative method, and Jewish prescriptive inquiry may not be "value free." When discussing Jewish values, "only the Torah will suffice." He calls attention to the Maimonidean requirement that in pre-Jubilee Judaism, no non-Jew may reside in a Jewish polity. (This is

a view so stark that even the late Rabbi Meir Kahane did not articulate it.) However, when non-Israelites are conquered through war, Israel must impose the moral law upon them.

It must be noted here that Novak takes the Noachide commandments to be a statement of Jewish universal natural law. If, however, this were the case, Maimonides would not claim that the acceptance of these laws as natural law known through reason, rather than as God's (positive law) command, is of no value. For Novak's reading of Maimonides, moral subjugation of the non-Jew is permitted; political subjugation is not. The reader should remember that Saul was deposed for a political sin, for not destroying Agag the Amalekite, and not for any other of his delicts; and God decides to end Ahab's political monarchy when he allows Ben Hadad to live, and not because of any other of his many moral sins. David is punished because of his sin with Bathsheba, but he is not deposed. Unlike Saul and Ahab, David's sin was moral, not political. For Maimonides, politics is state morality. Echoing the quietism of medieval Judaism, Novak is uncomfortable with what he takes to be the active messianism of aggressive religious Jewish nationalists.

Novak concludes his very important volume with the observation that Christians do not take Jews seriously because Jews are not religiously Jewish. He rejects secular or ethnic Judaism because he understands that there is no culture without cult. He then turns to two religious expressions that he finds in American Judaism: liberal and Traditional. When liberal Judaism is reduced to its core theological content, it requires that Jews merely be "ethical"; and one does not have to be

Jewish to assume this quality. Novak does not note that liberal Judaism's acceptance of homosexuality is an ethical rather than a ritual issue, demonstrating that the real content of liberal Judaism's "religion" are the mores and conventions of the politically correct liberal culture elite.

Novak's address of Traditional Judaism focuses on Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's positive response to prayer in the public schools. Novak identifies the popular Jewish penchant for secularizing America, subscribed to by a large segment of American Jewry, which holds that only in a non-Christian America will Jews find their place. Novak identifies with Rabbi Feinstein's concern that religious (halakhically observant) Jews participate as religious Jews in America, and that religious people, regardless of their creed, have a concern that their society be morally grounded. Unaddressed by Novak is the fact that prayer in public schools, when it occurred, had a distinctly Protestant ring. For the Jew, prayer is public, ideally in a *minyan*; for Christianity and its founder, it is private, in a closet. Novak challenges America's "Jewish Jews" to be taken seriously as exemplars of piety, learning, and insight who can inform American social and ethical discourse.

According to Novak, Jewish theology, or Aggada, serves to inform the Jew in applying the Jewish tradition in a normative, prescriptive dimension. He does not believe that the halakhic, or pure statute, is self-processing, and, as noted, he rejects, as does his teacher Abraham Joshua Heschel, what is termed the "pan-halakhic heresy," which contends that all Judaic normativity is ultimately reducible to Halakhah, or Jewish positive law.

Following the British legal thinker H.L.A. Hart, who argues that every law has a moral minimal standard, Novak pleads that there is such a standard underlying Jewish law, which must be applied when dealing with the gaps in the law, or those "hard cases" in which Jewish law offers no legislative or interpretive precedent. For Novak, philosophical aggadic speculation fills the gaps in the law; for most Orthodox positivists, these gaps are filled not by speculative theology, but by *ad hoc* policy decisions which reflect the norms of the living, believing, and observing Jewish community. Both Novak and the observing community are exercising subjectivity. Novak's subjectivity reflects a brilliant, if not idiosyncratic, perspective. For the legal positivist, any filling of the legal gap (which some scholars call the *penumbra*) is valid as long as higher legal norms are not contradicted; for Novak, his theology would fill the gaps in the law and limit the autonomy which the Halakhah does in fact afford the community of the faithful.

Novak's positions resemble those of religious, urbane Catholics more than they do those of Reform or Orthodox Jews. Because he is committed to Jewish law and its ethic, he rejects Reform theology; because he is trained as an academic ethicist, he deals with issues and idioms which are foreign to the training of most Orthodox Jews. His arguments are challenging, his insights are penetrating, and thoughtful Jews of all stripes, creeds, and commitments will learn much from this most original Jewish thinker.

#### Correction

In the article "The Concept of the Chosen People: An Interpretation," by Raphael J. Jospe (*JUDAISM*, Spring 1994), page 137, line 31, the phrase "derived from the root *b-h-r*" should read: "derived from the root *b-r-h*." We regret the error.

### Jews in Antiquity

*Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian.* By Louis H. Feldman. Princeton University Press. xii + 679 pages. \$59.00.

*Reviewed by* MARTHA HIMMELFARB

WHEN JEWS BEGAN TO ARRIVE IN America in the middle of the nineteenth century, they found themselves in circumstances very different from those they had left behind in Europe. They were no longer the only, or at least the most visible, minority. While they stood out to some extent as non-Christians, they were one of many ethnic groups hurrying to America's shores. They have since been joined by other religious minorities. The position of the Jews in America, then, is very different from their status for more than a millennium of European history, but it has a great deal in common with their place in the ethnically and religiously diverse Mediterranean societies of the third century B.C.E. through the third century C.E. In the several empires ruled by the successors of Alexander the Great and in the Roman empire that later absorbed them, the Jews were one of many conquered peoples under the rule of the new empires. Nor were they the only people with a significant diaspora: the presence of Arameans in Egypt, Syrians in Rome, Egyptians in Asia Minor, also drew their neighbors' attention. In a polytheistic religious culture, the Jews stood out for their monotheism, but they were by no means the only group devoted to a distinctive deity.

MARTHA HIMMELFARB is a Professor of Religion at Princeton University.



Louis Feldman's *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* sets out to offer an understanding of the place of the Jews in the ancient world, primarily in the period before the dominance of Christianity changed the rules forever. Feldman has devoted a distinguished scholarly career to the Jews in antiquity, particularly to the worlds of Josephus, but also to Greek and Roman attitudes toward the Jews and the question of Jewish proselytism, and the book is based to a considerable extent on his many articles. The book is learned and dense, and all students of these subjects are certain to learn something from it. Yet its analysis is deeply disappointing, in considerable part because it is unable to escape a tendency to examine the period before Christianity became the state religion of the Roman empire through the lens of the experience of the Jews in medieval Christendom.

This difficulty in shedding certain ingrained assumptions is particularly striking because Feldman tries so hard to do so. "This book began with a question," he writes in his preface. "How can we explain why the Jews in antiquity—so bitterly hated, as so many scholars have insisted—succeeded in winning so many adherents, whether as 'sympathizers' who observed one or more Jewish practices or as full-fledged proselytes?" To show the powerful hold of the position he rejects, Feldman invokes the voice of a colleague who "indignantly objected to the very idea that non-Jews ever failed to hate Jews." Against this colleague and what the great Jewish historian Salo W. Baron disapprovingly labeled the "lachrymose" conception of Jewish history, Feldman insists that the Jews of antiquity "were sometimes strong, self-confident, and influential,

winning many to their cause"" (p xi). This is hardly a daring position for a scholar at the end of the twentieth century, but I believe Feldman is correct that the view of the Jewish past between the Bible and 1948 as a long and unbroken series of disasters continued to exert its influence on many non-experts.

So Feldman starts out to show us that Jews were not universally despised in the ancient world, indeed that they were sometimes admired. At least quantitatively he achieves his stated goal. The book contains eleven chapters and a conclusion. The first two chapters discuss Jewish contact with Greek culture in Palestine and the Diaspora. The next three chapters are devoted to anti-Jewish attitudes, but they are followed by three on the attractions of Judaism and three more on proselytism and the phenomenon of sympathizers with Judaism.

Nonetheless, the way in which relations between Jews and non-Jews are described in the course of the book shows how difficult it is to free ourselves of inherited assumptions. As I have emphasized, the populations of the Hellenistic and Roman Empires were extremely diverse. The contrast of Feldman's title, *Jew and Gentile*, may tell us something about Jewish self-understanding, but it does not adequately describe the reality of the societies under discussion. The anti-Jewish attitudes of pagan intellectuals, for example, need to be compared to negative attitudes toward other ethnic groups to be fully understood. Yet Feldman devotes only one page in a text of over 400 pages to such comparison, insisting that the absence of "organized hatred or persecution" (p. 125) of these other peoples renders the comparison irrelevant. Surely, even if

we accept Feldman's claim about the peculiar quality of Greco-Roman dislike of the Jews, this is to offer as a conclusion the very problem that needs to be resolved.

Another striking example of the problematic use of a model drawn from the Christian Middle Ages is Feldman's idiosyncratic emphasis on an economic cause for popular animosity toward the Jews. Feldman is forced to admit that the ancient sources neglect to mention such a cause, but he reassures us that ancient historians are rarely interested in economic causes (p. 107). He then proceeds to gather a body of references to Jewish wealth in antiquity, wealth that he insists would have created anti-Jewish feelings. Yet given the silence of the ancient sources, it is hard to imagine that Feldman would have emphasized the role of economic factors in antiquity if it were not for the significant role played by the activities of the Jews as moneylenders and merchants in the development of anti-Semitism in medieval Europe.

It is not only the Middle Ages, the Jewish past, that casts its shadow over this book, but also the Jewish present. It is perhaps impossible for the student of Jewish history to be unaffected by concerns about contemporary Jewish life. Here Feldman's attitudes toward the possibilities for assimilation and survival in America's pluralistic society influence his reading of the ancient pluralistic society of the Hellenistic and Roman empires. The affect of such concerns can be seen clearly in his treatment of the problem of the Hellenization of the Jews.

Hellenization, or the blending of Greek culture with native traditions, was one of Alexander's goals in his program of world conquest. How deep

this process of blending ever went is a real question. Did the average Syrian peasant acquire anything more of Greek culture than a smattering of the language and some new names and titles for the gods he had always worshiped? Surely the high culture of the Greeks remained the reserve of the few. Even for the more educated of the subject peoples, Greek culture is likely to have been important in large part as the ticket to a job in the imperial bureaucracy and perhaps to acceptance among the Greek colonists who constituted the social elite throughout the Hellenistic world. Yet it is an undeniable fact that the Jews of Egypt produced a large and significant religious literature in Greek, some of it obviously influenced by, indeed part of, contemporary philosophical debates. Should the Syrian peasant be considered to have avoided Hellenization, while the Egyptian Jew embraced it? Or does the loyalty of a Jew like Philo, with the best philosophical education Alexandria had to offer, to his ancestral traditions, mean that he was less than fully Hellenized?

While some contemporary scholars of the Hellenistic world have complained of the "Eurocentrism" of their predecessors, arguing that they overstated the extent of Greek influence on the cultures of subject peoples such as the Persians or Babylonians, the issues at stake in investigating the Hellenization of the Jews are rather different. Scholarly discussion of the Persians and the Babylonians is not conducted, for the most part, by people who came to the topic out of identification with the objects of study. Students of the Jews in antiquity, on the other hand, are usually either descendants of the group under discussion or Christians drawn to the subject because of its

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importance for the emergence of Christianity. Thus attitudes toward the Hellenization of the Jews tend to reflect not the recent concern for political correctness embodied in the distaste for Eurocentrism, but profound anxieties about the place of Jews in the Western world and the relationship between Judaism and Hellenism and Judaism and Christianity.

Throughout the book Feldman makes his feelings about Hellenization quite clear, and they are negative indeed. Hellenization is the equivalent of assimilation, and thus a threat to Jewish survival and Judaism. If sufficiently superficial, it can be harmless. But it is never seen as having positive effects. Cultural synthesis, the emergence of new and creative forms out of the encounter of Judaism with Greek culture, is not a possibility for Feldman. These attitudes are particularly apparent in the first two chapters of the book, "Contacts between Jews and non-Jews in the Land of Israel," and "The Strength of Judaism in the Diaspora."

Against the dominant view of recent scholarship, most notably the work of Martin Hengel, that insists that the Jews of Palestine were deeply Hellenized despite the persistence of Aramaic as their language and of the institutions of priest and temple, Feldman wants to limit the influence of Greek culture as much as possible. Now a great deal hangs on what counts as Hellenization, and thus it is much to be regretted that Feldman's views remain implicit; given the importance of the question, some explicit reflection would surely have been in order. But a view of Hellenization as less extensive than Hengel claims is certainly not to be rejected out of hand. The Roman historian Fergus Millar,

for example, has argued that as compared to other subject peoples of the eastern Roman Empire, the Jews show less penetration of Greek culture and greater preservation of their ancestral traditions.

Feldman does not make his case, as Millar does, on a comparative basis. He simply dismisses the usual evidence for Hellenization. The Tobiads, a wealthy family of tax-collectors, who were an important presence at the court of the Ptolemies, are "highly assimilated—and truly exceptional" (p. 14). Jews may have used Greek names, but "there is no meaningful correlation between pagan versus Jewish naming and the extent of allegiance to and attitude toward Judaism and Jewish observance" (p. 15). In other words, Greek influence means assimilation, and if it doesn't cause assimilation, then it really doesn't count as Greek influence. Or as Feldman writes in the course of his argument for the rabbis' ability to evade all but the most limited of influence of Greek culture, "The rabbis would hardly have said such favorable things about Alexander the Great if, in their opinion, his arrival had marked the beginning of assimilation" (p. 32). The argument is hardly persuasive. The rabbis were notoriously ill-informed about the history of the Second Temple period. But what is really important in this claim is the use of "assimilation" as a synonym for "Hellenization."

For the Jews of the Diaspora, whose language was Greek, Feldman's strategy is somewhat different. He cannot deny some level of Greek influence, so instead he attempts to minimize its importance. Of the Wisdom of Solomon, usually treated as an example of the high level of philosophical culture of the Jews of Alexandria,

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Feldman writes, "And yet, although Greek influence cannot be denied, the first six chapters of the book, extolling the beauties of Judaism, are directed against recalcitrant and apostate Jews, who have succumbed to materialism, and the last ten chapters are a ringing denunciation of idolatry" (p. 56). The rhetoric of the passage is revealing. The Greek influence is obviously shameful—it "cannot be denied"—but it is mitigated by the fact that the book praises Judaism and denounces idolatry. The possibility that the nature of the praise of Judaism and the denunciation of idolatry is the result of the influence of Plato and other Greeks is not considered.

Feldman takes a similar approach to a quite different form of Diaspora piety, the magic found in charms and amulets. He sensibly admits that the body of evidence points to "a high level of syncretism." But his next move employs the same rhetoric he uses for the *Wisdom of Solomon*. "And yet this was all at the level of folklore and hardly diminished the loyalty to Judaism of the Jewish possessors of these amulets" (p. 69). I am sure that Feldman is right that possession of syncretistic amulets in no way indicates diminished loyalty to Judaism. But instead of dismissing the amulets as "folklore," it might have been worth asking about the nature of the Judaism of the amulets' owners and how the amulets fit into it. The rhetoric of "and yet" does not encourage such inquiry. The persis-

tence of anachronistic models is particularly evident in the conclusion to the chapter on the Jews of Palestine. Here Feldman compares them to the Jews of Eastern Europe, who lived among their neighbors for centuries with only minimal assimilation, because they, like the Jews of Greco-Roman Palestine, did not find the culture of their neighbors attractive. I hope I have already made it clear why such an analogy must be rejected. The last paragraph of this chapter begins:

The question, then, is not how thoroughly Jews and Judaism in the Land of Israel were Hellenized, but how strongly they resisted Hellenization. In other words, what was the power of Judaism that enabled it to remain strong despite the challenge of Hellenism and later of Christianity and even to counterattack through conversion of non-Jews to Judaism? (p. 44.)

In this short passage one can discern both the shadow of the Middle Ages and the shadow of the present. If it is not "lachrymose" in its conception, it has certainly erected barricades between the Jews and the rest of the world. With these words, it seems to me, Feldman has accepted the underlying assumptions of his colleague, if not his conclusions. Jews may not have been universally hated, but Jewish missionary activity is to be understood as a "counterattack." Such a view of the world can hardly do justice to the experience of the Jews in antiquity.



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